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ISAAC ASIMOV
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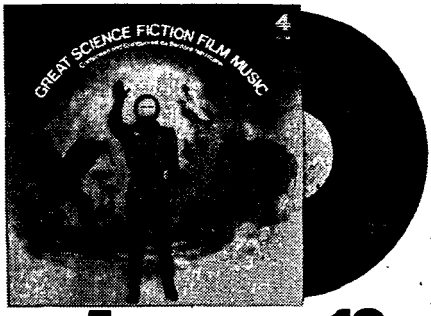

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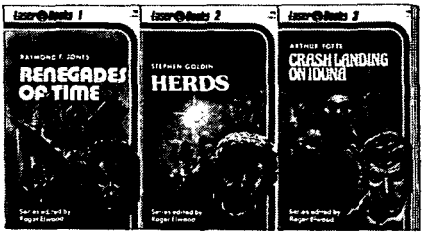

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The Silent Eyes of Time

by ALGIS BUDRYS

1.

Early on a day in the spring of 1971, Clinton Gallard walked steadily along the interminable G Concourse at O'Hare International. Most of the boarding areas were still well ahead. He took his time although the Caribbean flight was near departure. In a long and taut life he had detected the rhythm of how things work, and had fallen in with it.

He was a man with a rectangular torso, of equal width at shoulders and hips, thin from the side, with markedly delicate limbs. His legs were very long. He had a narrow, blade-nosed, tanned and age-spotted head. His short, thinning, coarse white hair swirled tightly about his scalp. His pale blue eyes were made secret by the deep folds creased into the leathery flesh around them, and were set far back in their sharply distinct sockets. He moved with economy, not much disturbing the hang of his carefully cut lightweight suit, and he walked with his hands ready.

He was remembering the thick humidity in the cabins of DC-3s floundering through Appalachian thunderstorms; the little fans whirring on their mounts along the edge of the overhead baggage shelf, trying to circulate the dampness and the airsick smell; the condensation running down the windows where the lightning flashed and flashed beyond the rain-drummed wings, altogether different from the blue spitting flame at the exhaust port; the briefcase clutched securely between his ankles, the two

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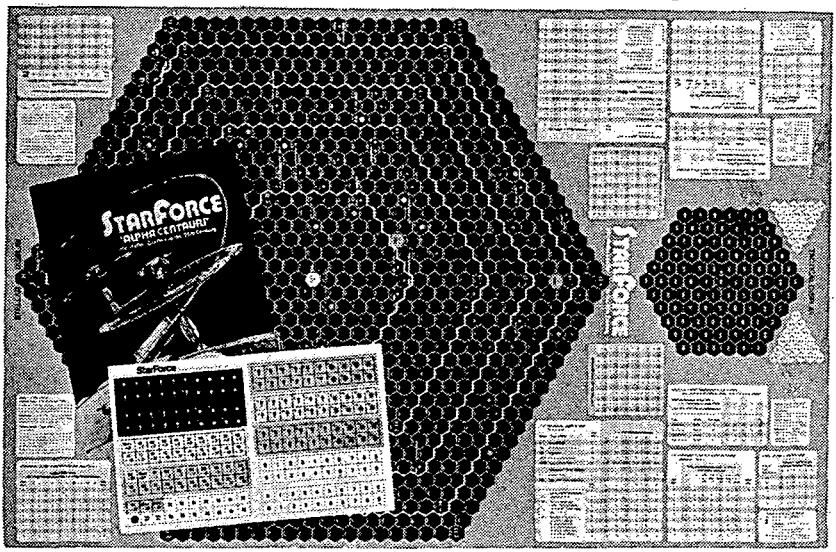

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of them journeying once again to Washington where they talked New Deal but dealt with you like Calvin Coolidge.

Then he remembered tall white ships easing out of Lower New York Bay with dance bands playing; soft yellow lights along the deck at night, and couples leaning back to smile into each other's faces with their arms around their waists; tall, cold drinks with mint sprigs and a kind of white-frosted ice, and the coast lights changing to Miami. Boys dived for coins at Nassau. In Havana, there was a winding street of little steps; a little park on an oval terrace where a man could sit at dusk, and then saunter up the hill toward a pale yellow stucco house where music played beyond the wrought iron railings.

The woman with him, Elizabeth, had a large shoulderbag slung over her California-cut tan poplin jacket. She was made shorter by his height, but she was nearly six feet tall, dressed for their trip in sports slacks. Only by looking around the edges of her large-lensed sunglasses could one see the beginnings of crows' feet, before the chestnut manes of her hair enclosed her high cheekbones and framed her chin and soft mouth. Smaller and younger was what Clinton Gallard conferred upon her, and love.

"We'll be at the gate in plenty of time," Gallard remarked in his relaxed, well-projected voice. She shortened her stride. He looked about him at Avis and motel advertisements in illuminated boxes on the concrete paneling of the concourse walls. He studied one with a critical eye. It was for the new models from AWC, "The Expert Name in Electronics." It was not a slogan of which he approved. Until last year, the advertising campaigns had been tagged "First...Best." He thought that was a more easily grasped assertion. And it left more room in the available space, so that the picture of the product — the handsome cabinetwork and buffed metal fascia, and the big tube with the evocative color photograph of white boats on a blue sea — could be brought closer. If you were in a game, it seemed to him, you played for every millimeter of ground.

They were passing boarding areas now. Great and small alike sat facing each other until their flight was called, ignoring each other's eyes while their knees nearly touched. It made Gallard picture muzhiks squatting beside telegraph poles along the right of way, waiting to flag the daily train on the Trans-Siberian railroad. It was not a world substantially different from the view before him when he'd sat in the valedictory chair at the Warton School of Finance back in 1928.

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As they neared their gate, he said, "Shit!" Elizabeth raised her head like a doe.

Gallard stopped and they waited for the man hurrying toward them. He was fifty-eight, sixty, faced like a beagle, cyanotic at the lips, wet-combed under his Homburg. "Clint! I'm glad I didn't miss you! I've been waiting for you." He thrust his hand forward, and Gallard took it in a measured grip.

"How are you, Charles," he said pleasantly. "Mr. Treville, this is Miss Farrier. Elizabeth, Mr. Treville is president of AWC Electronics." His successor. A man who had come up through the sales department.

"Very pleased to meet you, Miss Farrier," Treville said, barely diverting his glance from Gallard. "Clint, may we please ask you to postpone your trip?"

Gallard raised his eyebrows.

"Clint —" Treville looked about them. "Please come and let me talk to you."

Gallard studied him briefly. He sucked in one corner of his lower lip. Then he smiled in a kindly manner.

"Elizabeth," he said, "would you please see to canceling our seats and all that? I doubt if you'll be able to retrieve our baggage this late. But I'm sure Mr. Treville took that imposition into account and made his request nonetheless. Please meet us in the V.I.P. lounge." He pressed her shoulder fondly. "Don't worry — you won't be long, and I'll be surrounded by other old gaffers. We know what to do for each other."

He turned away with Treville. "It's strange to see you alone, Charlie," he remarked as they made their way back up the concourse. "No assistants carrying relevant papers, no vice-presidents to part the waves for you."

"Christ almighty, Clint, I had a hitch of a time catching you! By the time I got your housekeeper to admit where you might be, I had to just grab a cab and hustle out here. It's important, Clint. Here you are, all set to just sit around. Got yourself a nice little cooze there to keep off the cool breezes. And here's Charlie Treville saying 'Pardon the interruption.'"

"And I was telling you the point was made, Charles," Gallard said, his eyes crinkling in a kindly manner. "Just telling you it was made."

He and Treville exchanged no further words between there and the lounge. Gallard was remembering the morning when he was called in to Elmo Daugherty's old walnut-paneled office in the General Office building they'd used to have on lower Michigan Avenue. "Clint," Elmo Daugherty had said out of his flat, overslung mouth, "I

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believe it would do the company some good if we made you a vice president and let you straighten out that mess in Purchasing."

Gallard had said "The trouble in Purchasing is your cousin Paul."

Daugherty had stood looking out the window with his hands behind his back. "So force my cousin Paul to resign.'

They reached a quiet table in a corner of the lounge, and the waitress took their drink orders. Gallard leaned back in his chair, extending his legs. Treville hunched forward.

"It's your boy Hessenbirger down at Churchville Research," he said. "This time he's opened a can of worms." He eyed Gallard steadily. He ought to have been vindictive, perhaps triumphant. This sort of thing was presumed to be the reason why Gallard had left. Instead, Treville's mouth was slack with fear.

Gallard studied him carefully. He did not like to see fear in men of Treville's type. They always tried to make you pay, later, for having seen it. They operated along simple lines.

Gallard visualized a structure, called AWC, made of intricately curved wires. He saw it floating silvery and highlighted against a featureless soft black background. Because the wires looped and intercurved, they appeared to define and enclose a certain volume of space like a Tchelitchew sculpture. It was possible to misconstrue the space for the sculpture. In actual fact, even the wires were imaginary — a convenient representation of the tracks taken by moving particles whose courses were, quite literally, careers. And if one watched very closely, one could see AWC subtly throbbing to the frictions of their passage. Whereas Treville saw nothing but the shape, and furthermore thought it was all solid inside, like a potato.

Gallard smiled. "What has Hessenbirger done?"

"Worked up a way of reaching the future. I don't know what you'd call it — a — a *thing*; it's electronic, but it moves a man into the future and lets him bring things back — a future mass tranceiver? But it works. He's brought back stuff — coins, newspapers. He handed some of them out for souvenirs. And *then* he reported he'd made this thing."

"The future." Gallard cocked an eyebrow. "Really?"

"Here —" Treville handed him a U.S. quarter dated 1975.

"I'd rather see one of the newspapers," Gallard said, turning the coin in his lean fingers. "That would be harder to fake, I think."

But within him he pictured a landscape of rolling meadows and wooded glades with soft afternoon

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sky above, and in his mind he peeled away an infinitely thin layer of nearly perfect transparency, to reveal the same landscape, which in turn he lifted away for yet another, and others, as the leaves slowly shifted and the grass deployed in lax formations, and dusk fell upon this land within his mind until, there, past many increments now, he felt the first faint onset of an evening star, only its farthestmost photons yet impinging on his senses, so thin were the films.

"It's not a fake," Treville said. "It's been corroborated. Mangrum had him make another run. We now have calendars, newsmagazines, and Polaroids of completed buildings standing on vacant lots." Treville broke off as the waitress set down their drinks, smiled, and left.

"How many people know about it?"

"I don't know. All of Hessenbirger's associates, to begin with; he bragged to them as soon as he'd gotten back. Then a girl file clerk on his way to Mangrum's office — Hessenbirger's got a yen for her, I suppose, and wanted to impress her. Then a draftsman named Pogrobius; Hessenbirger likes to chase around the strip joints with him on Friday nights, and he happened to bump into him in the stairwell. Then Mangrum, of course — after all, you've got to let your Manager of Engineering know about it sometime, right? Then Mangrum called me, and sent a messenger with a confidential envelope of reports and samples, and I've spoken to Elmo Daugherty."

Daugherty was Chairman of the Board. A wise old fat man. Wary. "What did Elmo say?"

"He said to get hold of you."

"When did you speak to him?"

"This morning. I've been waiting for Mangrum to confirm everything. It's been 24 hours."

"Is anything specific in writing?"

"Sure. Engineering memos, research notes, and a slew of paper from Mangrum. Corporations have paper brain cells." Treville picked up his glass and drained off a mouthful. "You know that."

Gallard waved to Elizabeth across the room. "You do need me after all, Charles," he agreed. "I'll go see Elmo. Meanwhile, please arrange for a complete presentation to me at Churchville tomorrow morning. Ask Mangrum to meet me in the bar at the Marriott at seven this evening. Oh, and I'll need two connecting single rooms, and two seats on the Churchville plane. I suppose Mangrum can have his secretary do that for us."

"It's like you'd never left," Treville said quietly.

"Don't worry, Charles — I'll get it done and go away again."

"You had a lot of good ideas,

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Clint. Sitting where I sit these days, I can really appreciate what it must have taken to build up the company the way you did. There are lots of times when I wish —"

"And this is one of the times," Gallard said with a cordial smile. "But I *will* go away again. Promise."

Treville began to say something else, and then said: "I'll come down on the early morning flight."

"Well, of course you'd want to be at the presentation," Gallard said agreeably. He sipped his sherry. He thought to himself. "What does it say in tomorrow's newspaper, Charles?"

Treville shook his head, blurring his pale features. "You wouldn't believe it. You'll see for yourself. I wouldn't want to discuss things like that. The future is about people we're doing business with *now*, you know? How can I discuss it?"

Gallard looked at him kindly. "All right, Charles. If you can't say something good, don't say anything at all."

Here she was.

"Sit down, Elizabeth," Gallard said. "We'll be going to a place called Churchville, Indiana, tonight." He signalled to the waitress for her, thinking of Elizabeth systematically emptying the shoulder-bag into the drawers of an Indiana motel credenza; the sun lotions and bathing attire in one drawer, the pills and ampules and syringes into another. She would come to him in the night from the next bed if she heard him gasping; she would slip the nitroglycerin tablet tenderly under his tongue. "Chivas on the rocks with a splash of soda and a twist of lemon for the lady," he told the waitress softly.

He handed the girl his credit card. "We'll be leaving after that, so we'd like a check, please, as well." He raised his hand and gestured away Charles Treville's hasty move toward his own wallet. "No — that's all right, Charles. I'll be sending in a consultation bill." He winked the wink of one old travelling salesman to another, a thing he had studied many times. The thing was, though, that Treville inalterably saw him as a cutthroat, as if in a Travelodge mirror. So all the amenities between them were pro forma, and it did not actually matter which format one selected. Gallard sipped his sherry with a tender little smile.

2.

Elizabeth drove their rental car to Daugherty's home in Lake Forest. Gallard sat with his head resting comfortably on his seat-back, his arms around his knees.

The day had come when Daugherty had asked him to dine alone with the fattening old man in

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the upstairs room of the new G.O. "Clint, you son of a bitch," Daugherty had said. "I don't see any way to avoid making you chief operating officer. I'm gonna settle down on the board and go buy myself some big stone resting place on the North Shore, there, and let you make me richer."

They pulled up on the bluestone apron at the front of the landside entrance and went up the stone steps together at Gallard's most comfortable pace. Gallard rang, and the butler's eyes widened when he saw who it was, but he murmured "Very nice to see you here again, Mr. Gallard," as to the manner born.

Elmo Daugherty grunted when they came into the room. "Sit down, Clint. Drink? Miss Farrier? No and no." The three of them sat there in the library, Elizabeth in a corner turning the pages of a book, Gallard and Daugherty in two chairs near each other at the fireplace. "What do you know so far, Clint?" the old man said.

"As much as Charlie knows."

"Well, that's about as much as I know. What do you think?"

"I think Hessenbirger's done it. The same way he's done everything else. He sat there playing with his mind, and took a snatch of something he'd read in somebody's paper, and something he'd rubbed up against at a symposium, and something he'd dreamed when he was a kid, and the next thing he knew, he had a soldering iron in his hand."

"Son of a bitch, Clint, how do people do that?"

"That same way you don't have to read the stock tables. The tables are for technicians. Like high school civics texts. The purpose of college is to refute their lies and substitute a more sophisticated set. Meanwhile, people are out running the world."

"Well, Hessenbirger sure as hell doesn't run the world."

"He's just turned it upside down, Elmo. *That*'s the point."

"I know what the fucking point is!" Daugherty glanced quickly toward a tranquil Elizabeth and jerked his head back into place again. "We've got a nice, viable thing going here; big share of the market, control of half the basic patents —"

"Thanks to Hessenbirger."

"Thanks to you for finding Hessenbirger. — Bigger share of the market than we deserve, nice chunk of licensing income, lots of O.E.M. parts sales. We're not golden, but we're a fuck of a lot better off than anybody else in this country. We could have been up shit creek with the rest of them. You really built something, Clint. But you built it around one man —"

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"Around an approach. One man happens to fit it superbly at this point in the company's history. But there can always be others, as long as we keep the approach. You create a climate, and the sun shines."

"Yeah, well, we've got ourselves a tornado now. You'd better get us out of it."

Gallard stared calmly into the fire flickering amid the gas logs. "Why?" He smiled slightly to himself.

"Because you know damned well this isn't some lousy little policy question you and I can knock heads over and it hardly matters who wins. This is the whole world going to hell. Shit — you know what people are like. Get rich quick. Take the money and run. Crooked as a ram's horn. Cinci bettors. We've got our society surrounded and infiltrated with security systems out the ying-yang, and you still get pilferage and embezzlement being national industries. That's what they'd do, man — steal from the future and never think twice about it. Charlie Treville even had a couple of minutes where he wondered if we couldn't market this thing! Jesus!"

"Why me? I'm out of it, Elmo. Shot down."

"My ass. You quit. And I know damned well why you quit, and I don't blame you. My old man went down the hall flat on his back on a stretcher, right past all the secretaries and janitors, on his eighth and last coro-fucking-nary, and by God they had to pry a piece of correspondence out of his hand in the ambulance. I get my checkup every month, and when some of those smart LaSalle Street Money boys want me for something, you can bet your sweet patutie they come out here; it's just as easy to foam at the mouth and die in the back of a limousine as it is in some Goddamned North Western Railway commuter car. But don't give me that shot-down crap. I know whose balls I've got in my pocket, and the count sure doesn't include yours. You had me pinned to the mat." Suddenly Daugherty chuckled. "Too bad."

Gallard said pleasantly: "I think it was Bobby Layne of the Detroit Lions who said he never lost — there were just days when he ran out of time."

"Yeah, well, time's got you some extra time, Clint, boy."

"I see. Nobody else can handle Hessenbirger."

"Any two-year-old named Clinton Sturges Gallard could have figured that out by now. No — no, he's got us by the short hair, all right, but that's not all of it." Daugherty brooded. Gallard watched him carefully. The fat man drew dignity about him like a sheik

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donning a caftan over a bellyband full of skinning knives.

"Maybe—" Daugherty stopped, considered, proceeded. "You know, you've been right many times. You said the Japs would come, and they did. You pumped up Churchville and got Hessenbirger in there. Now we purchase what we want from our Far Eastern colleagues, but some of it's our own property under license. And we're still building and selling over here. You take a look at where some of the other outfits are, and you have to say to yourself that Clint Gallard kept AWC's ass out of the bucket. I have to sit here and think about a track record like that." Daugherty nodded to himself. "I do. All right, but then Charlie Treville and the other boys in Sales began getting their back up. Every time you set a sales target, what I heard was a lot of screaming about how we couldn't meet competition on dealer profit margins and product reliability. They told me the dealers were fomenting about too much warranty work against low per-unit income. And they had a point. We were costing too high at the factories. But maybe that *was* Manufacturing's fault."

He'd spent years attempting to introduce efficiency into the factories. The managers always agreed enthusiastically that it was time to take a new look at how things were done. And then they'd settle for whatever good old Joe, the senior production engineer, told them. If you looked too closely at good old Joe, with his twenty years in toward his pension, maybe somebody'd think good old Manager wasn't untouchable either. But if you all stuck together and waited it out, and formed little alliances with Charlie Treville's people, why, something might happen to get that son of a bitch Gallard off everybody's back. So they met their cost targets by cutting quality. And Marketing made up for it by proving it was time to raise the advertising budget. It was the good old difference between the way business is talked and the way business is done. "American Wireless Corporation is a third-generation company, Elmo," Gallard said. "We're not like the postwar organizations. Now don't tell me you're just realizing how the game is played, Coach."

Daugherty waved his hand. "All right, all right, I know what it's like to get your heel tendons nibbled in the dark. That comes with the territory. Any time you want to bitch about this being a mossback outfit, just remember you didn't do badly in it. And it let you attract people like Hessenbirger, and this hotshot Chadwallader you've got managing the microwave plant, and Austin over in O.E.M. Sales, Rickard in

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Parts Merchandising, and half a dozen other monkeys you've got climbing up all the ladders we've got. Don't wave that tarbrush around so fast and loose. I remember when if we'd let you have your way, every color TV in America would have that damn filter wheel rumbling around in front of the screen." He chuckled again. "There's a Moscow for every Napoleon. That's why corporations like committee decisions. But sometimes..."

He paused for a long while. "I've wondered if you see this company the same way I do," he mused. "I don't think many people do."

"Really?"

"I've been with it, one way or another, almost from the beginning. That's — what? — forty-six years. I was one of the first employees that wasn't a partner. Came up through the Comptroller's Department, just like you did. Shit, I *was* the Comptroller's Department for a while." The stubby-fingered hand came down hard on the arm of the chair.

"I'm aware of that, Elmo," Gallard said. In the last year of his tenure, the senior accountants had begun producing policy memos against maintaining in-house development, and in favor of sub-contracting major assemblies. "I'm always interested in what could make my own people turn against me."

"Yeah, well, maybe I was interested in what you'd come up with instead. I figured a smart operator like you could cook out alternate solutions and still meet the profit targets I promised the stockholders. Too bad you never quite had the time."

"You were getting ready to tell me about something else, Elmo."

"Yeah. Yeah, I was. I was going to say a corporation is one of the world's crudest life-forms. It feeds on its market, and it develops size in response to intake volume, you know? It gets its shape from the constituents in what it eats. So it gets big, and it puts out new pseudopods and retracts old ones, and that looks like evolution. But it doesn't really have any organs. The people in it know they're not an arm or a heart. They're just a piece of pseudopod. And for all they know, they may be getting vestigial. So they're always looking around for hostility. They've always got their heads up in case something says it's time to slough them off." Daugherty stroked his hand ruminatively along his jaw.

"A corporation gets no poontang, you know?" he said. "Doesn't reproduce. We talk about 20,000 independent businessmen in our dealer network, and we point to a dozen subsidiaries, but it's all

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pseudopods. Feed momma ipecac and the children vomit. A corporation only gets one life. So it's got to live forever. To do that, it has to keep changing shape. Got to have people who might be cancer, but might be a new chromosome, too. Might be the only kind of mutation we can get, you know?"

Gallard smiled pleasantly. "Elmo, I told Charlie Treville and I'm sure he promptly told you. I will go to Churchville, I will straighten things out. There's no need to motivate me."

"Yeah, well, I like to be subtle. I'm a ham-fisted Irishman from Tulsa and I like to be subtle."

Daugherty faced forward again. "Time," he said. "Paradoxical, its being time. The kettle everything boils down in."

Riding to Meigs Field for the commuter airline, Gallard watched the limbs of the elms along Sheridan Road form traceries overhead, their outermost shoots barely misted with the first tentative green buddings of spring. "Elizabeth," he remarked, "did you know that the head of one of America's top twenty companies thinks of his product as excrement?"

3.

The Beech 99 put them down on the south side of the city, miles from the Marriott, which was located near the industries on the northeast side. Riding through it in the taxi with Elizabeth, Gallard looked around him at Churchville. It was an old riverfront town that had spread, mainly in the 19th century, and presented a variety of architectural styles in wood and brick. It had been founded in 1794, when the United States of America had sent General Anthony Wayne here to stand against the last vestiges of commercial encroachment by the French. Situated to take advantage of barge traffic, crossed, eventually, by railroads connecting with Chicago and St. Louis and the Mississippi, made an Interstate intersection by the Federal Highway Act of the 1950s, it had a population of 150,000 and an industrial capacity outstripping the gross national product of many civilized nations.

He looked over at a riverfront section that had been condemned, was partially wrecked, and was dotted with fresh signs promising office occupancy in the Indiana Life Tower Complex in the spring of next year. Gallard could remember when there had been an old drummers hotel there, with photographs of twelve-wheeled steam engines in the bar, and cold draft beer in thick, seamed balloon glasses. There was still one block, away from the renewal area, where all the shops were in 1870 decor or its approximation, and the gas-

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lighted street was red brick. But it was a tourist development, ten years old, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce.

"I wonder, Elizabeth — are you aware of the long-term effects of the Lousiana Purchase?" he almost said. Instead, he sat back as the dusk gathered.

They passed a strip shopping development; a grocery store, a fried chicken place, a beauty salon and a TV repair. "Genuine AWC Parts," the decal said. And if the dealer was bright enough to count, he was using them in everything that came into his shop. A Zenith ran just as well on an AWC replacement tube as it did on original equipment, and the dealer's profit was a hell of a lot higher. Gallard's lower teeth touched his upper lip.

Shortly after he had seen the first star, they reached the motel. They checked in with the usual amount of "Yes, Mr. Gallard," and promises of delivery if their baggage caught up, and after they had refreshed themselves as well as possible, they made a dinner reservation for eight o'clock and went down to the bar to wait for Mangrum.

Gallard had always considered this bar a likable fraud. Dressed in beams and siding taken from old farm buildings and refinished in plastic spray to look unfinished, it gave him a feeling of coziness which the dim cocktail candles on each table made even more approprtate. A girl with a guitar was singing quietly beside the stone fireplace, seated on a high stool and wearing a gingham dress, blonde hair long and clean in the light from a baby spot as she bent her head gracefully toward the microphone.

They made their way toward a table that would let him see the parking lot entrance, and sat down. He settled himself comfortably and smiled at Elizabeth. "Shall we both have another?" he asked. She smiled back at him, her eyes almost the same color as his, now that her glasses were put away in the bag, and he winked at her.

A waitress came over, dressed in the standard short, low-cut costume, and he smiled up at her pleasant face.

"May I bring you a drink, sir?"

"Yes, thank you. You're new since my last time here, aren't you? This is Elizabeth, and I'm Clint. What's your name?"

"Patty, sir," she smiled back.

"Clint. My father's name was Sir. Well, Patty, please bring Elizabeth a Chivas on the rocks, with a splash and a twist, and I'll have a dry sherry, straight up. You mustn't bring me any more after that, because I might embarrass Elizabeth, but there'll be

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another gentleman joining us shortly."

The girl's smile widened by the extent he'd been hoping for. "All right, Clint, we'll do all that. Can I bring you some cheese and crackers to get on with?"

"That would be very nice. Thank you." He watched her walk away toward the service bar, his eyes resting on the play of candlelight upon the sheer dark nylon over her thighs. He let the singer's music wash away all his thinking while he leaned back in the chair. My soldiers lie slain for the emperor's head, he mused. Huzzah for the monarch; a mass for the dead.

Patty brought them their drinks and a snack, bending low over the table to set them down. "What's that perfume?" he asked, and when she told him, with pleasure, he remarked: "It's very nice. Thank you, Patty." He pushed the snack toward Elizabeth's side of the table and sipped his drink slowly, watching people come and go, and Patty and the other waitress circulating among the tables, bending, stooping, reaching, exchanging pleasantries with the clientele. When the singer finished her set he applauded softly. After a while, he saw Harry Mangrum come in. He smiled toward the man and raised one arm in the air.

When Gallard had been managing the old Akron plant that was now a regional parts depot, his assistant had been a man named Frank Childress who loved to organize touch football games at the company July picnic. He would raise his hand in the air, and drop it to send his runners forward before he passed off, but he could not bring himself to touch Gallard if Gallard intercepted and ran near him. Not even if he ran at him. Gallard lowered his arm, remembering Childress sitting on the grass with his hand over his bloody mouth, still not claiming a touch.

Mangrum was a spare, short man with protruding jaw muscles and a downswept mouth. He wore bifocals and brushed his hair straight back. His clothes were tight. He came over with short quick steps. His handshake was bony.

Gallard introduced him to Elizabeth and Mangrum acknowledged her stiffly. He sat down with his hands one atop the other on the table.

"I appreciate your taking the time away from your family this evening," Gallard said to him. The man nodded. When Patty came over, he ordered a tomato juice.

"It's an important thing," Mangrum said, clipping out each syllable. "We'll have all the facts for you in the morning."

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"I'm sure you will. I just wanted to get the feel of the situation tonight. Tell me — what security measures have you taken?"

Mangrum glanced uncomfortably toward Elizabeth.

"No — no, that's all right. I'm Miss Farrier's only interest in this situation. Please go ahead with the details."

Mangrum clasped his hands more tightly. "All right, if you say so. The first thing I did was identify everybody Hessenbirger had talked to. Then I got them all up to my office right away. I reminded them this thing is just as much AWC's property as anything else from our labs, and I told them the company had a right to expect confidentiality."

Gallard nodded. "Sound practice. Who is 'everybody'?"

"Four research engineers, a draftsman, and a girl file clerk. And I hadn't let Hessenbirger leave my office after he'd told me."

"And that contained the situation?"

Mangrum shook his head. "No. Not all the way. When I asked them, it turned out the girl had shown a 1973 dime to the secretarial pool she worked with. There were eight in the pool, plus the supervisor."

"And how did you solve that?"

"Delayed it, first. I called the supervisor and told her to move the whole bunch into the first floor conference room and wait for me. Then I called one of my assistants and sent him there to keep them company until I was free."

"How much do you suppose your assistant learned from the experience?"

"It can't have been very much. And he's been with me for a long time; he's learned to keep his guesses to himself until called for."

"And what else did you do to handle that offshoot?"

"When I could, I went down there and apologized for keeping them after work. I told them I'd authorize overtime pay. I sent my assistant home, and then I told the girls I'd met somebody at a Rotary luncheon who made a passing remark to me about some defense work that had gone through the labs recently. And I said I'd traced the leak back to this particular secretarial pool."

Gallard smiled. "Go on."

"I made the point that we like to operate on the basis that 'What you see here, what you hear here, let it stay here.' We like to feel all our employees understand that. I said that the trained government security investigators I'm often in contact with always made the point that it wasn't just deliberate malice or espionage they were constantly checking for — it was simple gossip. I said that gossip isn't

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against the law, but the results can be. And I said I felt it was time to caution this particular group."

"You said all that."

"Yes, sir. I had the conference room microphones on. You can hear the tape tomorrow, if you'd like to."

"That won't be necessary. Go on."

"I said I wanted each of them to privately examine their consciences and see if they hadn't been looking forward to telling somebody about our demonstration coin. And I said I hoped they understood this example for what it was — a step taken by the company to teach a valuable lesson without singling out any particular individuals at this time. And I said a note was being put in each of their folders in Personnel to show they had attended this conference and had the benefit of this lesson. I pointed out that this was better than giving one single person a bad reference that would terminate them at AWC and make them unemployable anywhere else in Churchville."

Gallard said: "And how did they take to that?"

Mangrum's lips turned upward momentarily. "They got the message."

"Very intelligently done, Harry. And what did you do about the primary contacts?"

"Well, I took care of that as best I could before I fixed the secretaries. First, I got the dime back from the clerk and I got the newspaper entertainment pages from the draftsman."

"Did you tell *them* it was a hoax?"

Mangrum shook his head. "No. Hessenbirger would have contradicted me. And the engineers knew he'd come up with something that wasn't a coin die or a printing press."

"Had they seen him operate it?"

"No. He has his own area in the labs, and they stay out of it. You know what he's like. They look in once in a while, of course."

"Has anyone seen him operate it?"

Mangrum nodded. "Yes, I have. But that was later."

"I didn't mean to make you digress, Harry. Go on."

"After I got the evidence away from them, I told them all to stay ready for detail meetings with the brass. That got the four engineers to thinking the right way."

"Very good, Harry. That leaves the file clerk and the draftsman. What about them?"

"They're in single rooms at a motel. So's Hessenbirger. With another one of my assistants."

"How do they explain that to their families?"

"None of the three of them are

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married. The girl doesn't live at home."

"Fortunate. Well — I suppose you had your secretary take down a transcript of the meeting in your office?"

Mangrum nodded. "Yes. I enclosed a copy with my sealed report to Mr. Treville."

"How many copies are there?"

"They're all confidential."

"I understand that, Harry. Kept in locked filing cabinets and all that. How many, however?"

"One for Mr. Treville, one for the office confidential files, one copy for the legal department — they'll make a Xerox, of course, so they can divide it between their general files and the patent section — and I have a personal confidential file."

"Five, plus the Xerox."

"Four, plus."

"Your secretary will have kept a carbon, I think, clipped to the pages from her shorthand book. In case anyone ever questions her accuracy."

Mangrum frowned. "I suppose that's right. But she'll have locked that up, too. She's a mature, level-headed woman."

"And where are her files?"

"Well, I don't know — somewhere in the area near her desk."

"No matter," Gallard said easily. "There will also be Xeroxes made of Mr. Treville's copy in Chicago, I imagine."

"I'm not responsible for anything that goes on at the General Office."

"Quite so. Don't worry about it, Harry. Well, now, we have engineering memos and Hessenbirger's working notes, too, I suppose."

"Being treated on the same basis."

"Right. And your secretary doesn't discuss office matters outside."

"She never has, or she wouldn't be working for me."

"Yes. Now, what about this overnight business? How did you persuade Hessenbirger and the others to go along with that?"

Mangrum's lips thinned momentarily. "He demanded a promise I'd file a report to the G.O. that would bring you down here. I gave it to him, and he persuaded the other two."

"That's a nice compliment to your reputation for honesty."

"I can do without his judgment."

Gallard sighed. "Look, Harry, Hessenbirger is simply incapable of responding maturely to anyone who directly supervises him. There is no way he's ever going to behave reasonably with you, but don't take it personally."

"I've understood all that from

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the day I was hired."

"Yes. Well — this motel where they're all staying. This would be the second night, now. Where are they? Here?"

Mangrum's head jerked. "I don't have any budget for things like this. They're at that motel near the manufacturing plant. It's clean and serviceable."

"The one near Route 30? Where the truckers get rooms for six dollars a night?"

"It's the same one I was booked into when I came to interview here."

"I didn't know that," Gallard said. He looked at Mangrum's knuckles. "What about Hessenbirger's device?"

"I locked up his area."

"Is it turned off?"

"Hessenbirger says it is. And I pulled the plug out of the power supply."

"What does his device look like?"

Mangrum grimaced. "It's about what you'd expect — a lot of breadboarding, and equipment racks patched in, and a station for the operator. That's just a three-sided box made out of pegboard. So he can hang things on it. And a lab stool to sit on. You'll see it tomorrow."

"And it uses some sort of standard power supply?"

"Two twenty volts AC, right out of the wall. I don't know how many amps it draws. I had him make the one run in it before we shut everything down. Just to make sure it wasn't some kind of charade. He was gone for about twenty minutes."

"Does the whole machine go? If it's attached to the wall?"

"No. Just he goes. And the stool. Whatever's inside the box, I suppose."

"Does that tell you anything? What I mean to say is, I'm no engineer, of course. I wonder whether you have any thoughts on what principles he's using or how his hardware works. Have you discussed it with him?"

Mangrum sat back. "No, sir, I haven't. I haven't read his notes, either, and I won't until I'm authorized to do that. I've instructed him to have a complete explanation in the morning."

"Are you impressed by what he's done?"

"I'd be a fool not to be." There was a pause. "I'll be in the history books as the bureaucrat who didn't hand him the keys to the city."

Gallard smiled sympathetically. "Take an old man's word — for every historian, there are two to refute him. Personally, I feel AWC was well justified in its selection of managers for Churchville."

Mangrum nodded stiffly. "Thank you."

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"What further plans do you have for handling these people?"

"Sir, all of that is up to you. I've done every reasonable thing I could. I've got this event confined to a practicable set of dimensions, and I've notified the G.O. I didn't need Hessenbirger to tell me to do that. Now you're here. I'll devote every possible effort of Churchville Division toward carrying out your decisions and instructions. I think I've done everything anyone in my position could do, and I'm going to go on doing that. As well as carrying out all the other assignments on our schedule."

Gallard smiled at him. "Well said. All right, Harry. I'm looking forward to a comprehensive presentation in the morning. You'll be picking us up at seven thirty? How about a real drink before you go? Well, all right — thank you again for coming. It's been very valuable"

They said good night and Mangrum left. Gallard shook his head. "Would you believe," he remarked to Elizabeth, "that people plan and labor to achieve that man's position?" He sipped his sherry.

"Frozen sleep," Elizabeth said.

Gallard continued to study the glass in his hand. "Yes. You've been thinking it through. Practical applications. It would be nice to be brought forward in time and find surgeons who do heart transplants that work. Quite a bit of that sort of thing comes to mind, yes, it does. But there have been no miracles in my past, and there's no reason to expect otherwise of the future." He grinned. "I wonder if Mangrum gave her another dime." He looked around him at the room.

Outposts, he thought. He remembered that in Akron the only time he ever saw the good dining rooms was when the General Office people came to town. You'd sit there taking mental notes in your expense account, looking forward to a stiff policy memo about over-entertaining, wondering what the visiting brass would find wrong at the plant in the morning.

Gallard glanced at his wrist. "Let us be served," he said, and they went in to dinner. He toyed with his broiled fish. He lost interest in the lemon-dressing salad after the first few forkfuls. He remembered how he had eaten steaks here — good, hot New York cuts sizzling on platters you wouldn't dare touch — and had sat smoking a cigar and drinking Grand Marnier on the rocks, trading jokes with his staff and the Churchville management who were there to entertain them. He eyed a man at the next table piling sour cream and bacon bits on his baked potato. "Your filet looks very good, Elizabeth," he said politely. "They know how to treat beef here."

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4.

He sat on the edge of the bed and called Lake Forest. When the houseman had gotten the phone to Daugherty, Gallard said: "I think we'll be able to manage."

"What's the situation?"

"Well, Mangrum has been clever with the people under his thumb and successful with the rest. I give him a passing grade. I believe money and footwork will do the remainder."

"Go ahead and spend the money. Tell Treville I said so." Daugherty grunted. "And supply the footwork."

"I've been taking all that as given, Elmo. I'm calling to impress upon you that they know what we're doing. There's too much paper in existence, and too many people who'll be moved around. 1975 is sitting up there waiting for us."

There was a pause on the line. "I suppose I was hoping against it. But I know."

"So the best I can do is ensure they are we."

"Well, I hope you can attain your best."

Gallard pictured the fat man sitting on his bed with his stomach on his thighs, his shoulders round, his head collared in the folds of his neck. A pile of Daugherty, pressed upon. Early to bed — it was nine o'clock in the Central time zone; for that matter, nine o'clock pulses beat in the wrist under Gallard's 10 PM watch, but tomorrow morning the leverage would be the other way.

"Elmo, do you see a single major commercial use for this thing?"

"I had a bunch, at first. The more I think about it, the more I cross off. You?"

"I don't know. Perhaps Hessenbirger will spark something."

"Be the least he could do."

Gallard smiled one-sidedly into the phone. "We musn't knock him, Elmo. You and I are of interest. He ranks with Prometheus."

"Yeah, well, no wonder they staked him out for the vultures."

The conversation dragged to a close. Gallard put the phone down and smiled at Elizabeth, who had finished unpacking her bag and was sitting on the other single bed looking at him closely. "I'm all right," he said. "For a lonely old man who has to get up too early in the morning."

"I don't like you getting this tired," she said.

"Well, that comes with the territory. You can give me one of those vitamin shots in the morning. That's a nice high."

"I'm not crazy about handing those out instead of sleep."

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"Sleep is the enemy, Elizabeth. Sleep is the thief in the night," he said, unbuttoning his shirt, fumbling at his cufflinks with his numb fingertips. "Good night."

"Good night, Mr. Gallard."

He turned off the light and they finished undressing in the dark, getting into their beds. He lay on his back staring up through closed lids, thinking to himself as if speaking to his wife. There had been several times when he had almost left her, because of situations not quite like this, before she died. Wherever you are, he said to himself, you've got to be laughing like hell. If you can see me. If you care. If you cared.

He lay awake for a while longer, and then finally drifted off. Then in the morning, at six, their baggage came, with United stickers over the original Eastern tags, and there was an entire set piece with Elizabeth stepping into the next room through the connecting door, and two sets of tips for the bellboy, and clutchings of blankets around shoulders, and all that fumbling and thumping, so that he was cranky and off-stride for half an hour afterward, even though the bellboy obviously thought himself no fool and added another negligible jot to Gallard's reputation which, God knew, Gallard would have liked to spare him.

5.

The Churchville Engineering and Research Division of AWC Electronics, Incorporated, was housed in a 1960-modern building of glassed curtain-walls set in a parklike five acres off U.S. 30 Bypass. The fountain at the front was lighted pink by night. In the early glare of morning, it plumed southwestward in the wind. As Mangrum silently held the car door for Gallard and Elizabeth, an airport taxi pulled up with Treville in it. They shook hands and exchanged good mornings all around. Mangrum led them inside.

"You boys have a good talk last night?" Treville asked when they had reached Mangrum's office and settled themselves.

"Very satisfactory," Gallard said, waving off a tray with cups and a Thermos jug of coffee proffered by Mangrum's secretary. She looked and dressed like the hostess at a hotel dining room. He presumed this augured for reliability. She put sugar and powdered creamer in Mangrum's cup for him, and he drank from it without wasting a premonitory sip. One might assume, Gallard decided, that there was mutual confidence between them. She looked aggressively at Elizabeth's knees. Elizabeth smiled and turned in her chair to create a somewhat more modest line of sight to her skirt hem from

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Mangrum. Gallard cleared his throat softly.

"How do you want to do this?" Mangrum asked, looking exactly between Gallard and Treville. "I have everybody waiting for whenever you're ready."

"All in one room?"

Mangrum shook his head. "No. I have the engineers separate. And Hessenbirger's by himself in the conference room, getting his presentation ready. One of my assistants is helping him with his charts and drawings."

"Fine," Gallard said. "Leave things that way for the moment. We have some underbrush to clear out first. I'd like to see the personnel files on the other two."

Mangrum handed them over from his desk, where they'd been lying ready. Gallard took them with a nod of appreciation. "By the way, do all those people have coffee?" he remarked, and the secretary left the room on Mangrum's glance. Gallard worked quickly through the two folders.

The draftsman was Knud Pogrobius, graduate of a technical academy in Sweden. He'd originally entered the U.S.A. as a member of an amateur bicycle racing team sponsored by Huskvarna. He was in his 30s and had been with AWC three years; no previous U.S. employment. Not a citizen, so not cleared for defense contract work. He'd had the usual merit raises, no promotions, and an unvaried series of *satisfactory*'s on his annual review report forms. "Laconic," Gallard remarked.

Mangrum said: "Excuse me?"

"Your drafting department supervisor seems to use few words. Do you know anything about Pogrobius?"

Mangrum shook his head.

Treville said: "You know we have a lot of draftsmen."

"I can understand that. What do you know about this man Hazen?" He looked at Mangrum.

"The drafting supervisor? Top-notch. Gets out a lot of work, gets it out clean, never makes special demands on the division."

"Strengths and weaknesses?"

"Well, those are his strengths," Mangrum said. "I guess if he's got a weakness, it's that he's a little too fussy on government projects. Nothing wasteful — he just takes longer. Sometimes he calls things back and has them redone."

"Never happens on house projects?"

Mangrum pondered. "No. Not for some time."

"How many years?"

Mangrum pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Oh, about three."

"Explanation?"

Mangrum shrugged. "I'd say it might be because he knows he does a good job. He's just a little more

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self-critical on contract work." He had brought the words out slowly, and he was frowning over a new thought.

Gallard smiled at him. "Pogrobius works only on house projects. He joined us three years ago."

"I noted that from his file."

"He's making his supervisor look good."

Mangrum nodded. "I've been thinking that."

Treville said: "It's to a supervisor's credit if he can find and keep good people."

"Yes. Who hired Hazen?" he asked offhandedly.

"I did," Mangrum said.

"Well, that's to your credit," Gallard replied mildly. "All right, now, let's see about this girl." He tapped his fingertips busily against the back of the other Manila folder. "Grace Chute. Grace Chute, Class of '69 Churchville South High School, diploma in Business Arts, white female American age 19, marital status single, value to AWC marginal. Job performance passable, absenteeism just within acceptable limits, wages commensurate with value. The purpose of this horse is to occupy the space that would otherwise be filled by another horse." He looked up at Mangrum. "What's your impression of her?"

Mangrum shrugged.

"Well, suppose your son announced their engagement?" Gallard studied the manager's face. "I see. Do you have a son?"

"I have a daughter. In college." His eyes flickered sideward to a corner of his desk, where a small leather-backed photo easel stood alone. Apparently he did not keep a picture of his wife in his office.

"I'm sure she makes you proud," Gallard said sincerely. He thought of his own one child disappeared into the maw of Haight-Ashbury and was glad again that his wife was dead. "Well, all right. I think we have a working fix on this situation." He closed both folders and laid them on Mangrum's desk.

Mangrum said: "Hessenbirger couldn't have done more damage if he'd picked them out deliberately."

"Quite so." Gallard smiled down at the floor. He scratched absently behind his right ear, then stretched out in his chair and folded his hands in his lap. "I had a friend in college who had no head for betting. It infuriated good players to be in poker games with him. It frustrated them to see him winning less money than they might have."

Treville said: "This draftsman has no handles on him. He could leave us any time and get a job with somebody else."

"Yes," Gallard agreed. "He has a skilled specialty, no

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particular career, no family, no responsibilities."

"And this underage girl is dynamite."

"Doesn't even know what's happening," Mangrum said. "There's no telling what she'll do."

"Ah, well," Gallard said, "she and Pogrobius have had quite some time to sit and think. They'll each have pared down to a few options. They'll be nowhere near as pliable as they might have been."

Mangrum said: "I don't see what else I could have done with them. If I'd turned them loose —"

Gallard doubted if Hessenbirger would have let that happen. But that was beside the present point. "You did exactly the right thing, Harry," he said. "Your instincts were perfect."

"I don't know about that," Treville demurred. "They're going to be pretty hard to get along with."

Gallard smiled at him kindly. Mangrum had been starting a newly relieved expression, and Treville had doused it. A salesman like Charlie ought to have weighed how many points it would cost him to assert an opinion just now. But then, Treville was under a strain. And, of course, he was a president now, and presidents run things. They don't sit back quietly in the manner of board chairmen. And it is difficult, Gallard admitted to himself, to know how to help things develop at their own pace, when there is great urgency upon one. "We do appear to be dealing from weakness," he said agreeably.

Mangrum, he noticed, was watching him closely. He appeared to be learning something. Gallard smiled again. "Now, then," he said. "We have a great many rows to hoe this morning. Let's have the girl in here." He nodded to Mangrum, who immediately picked up his desk phone and spoke into it. Gallard turned his countenance on Treville. "Charles, I assume you feel we have to make the best of a bad situation with this person. It may be very difficult for all of us."

"I don't see any other way. We've got to get things back under control."

"It's aggravating that someone with her brains in her pants might have a multibillion-dollar entity at her mercy," Gallard mused. "Can you imagine what would happen if she went to the government with this story?"

"Yeah, I've thought about it," Treville said, tight-lipped. He wiped his hand across the flesh above his mouth.

To look at him through Gallard's eyes was to share visions of plainly dressed dispassionate guerrillas riddling the entire structure; of unimpressed strangers saying Yea and Nay and What's

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This in Charles Treville's province. Glancing at Mangrum, Gallard could see the same thing. Well, for that matter the fear and indignation were there within him, too, or he could not have detected it in these others.

"The girl's on her way up," Mangrum said.

"Let's hope she doesn't give us too rough a time," Gallard said.

Mangrum began: "Maybe Miss Farrier should —"

Gallard shook his head. "I never know when I'm going to need Miss Farrier." He glanced at Treville. "Just concentrate on what Grace Chute could do to us, Charles," he said.

Treville put his hands on his thighs and stared at Gallard. "I don't need reminding," he said. His fingernails dragged slowly across the fabric of his trousers. Gallard saw his Adam's apple move suddenly.

"Sorry," Gallard said mildly, smiling.

6.

Mangrum's secretary brought her to the door and hesitated. "Please join us, Mrs. Buchanan," Gallard said as he rose from his chair. "We'll need you to take notes of our agreement with Miss Chute." He crossed the room and held out his hand to the girl, who stood small in the doorway, looking up at him out of darting seal-colored eyes while she held her body still.

"I'm Clinton Gallard, Miss Chute," he said. "The General Office has sent me down here to do the best I can." He tentatively squeezed her cautiously offered hand. "This is Mr. Treville, the president of the company, and you know Mr. Mangrum, who heads this division. And this is Miss Farrier, who flew down here from Chicago as Mr. Treville and I did. Please make yourself comfortable." He glanced at Mangrum's secretary. "Can Mrs. Buchanan bring you another cup of coffee? Have you had breakfast? I think we can get you something from the canteen."

"That's okay," the girl said. "I'm all right." Her voice was repressed — a thin, undirected presentation of a Midwest twang full of plangent nasals that came and went in Gallard's ears as she turned her head from side to side, counting all the faces.

She was a pale, thin-boned person without much in the chest; she wore a short-skirted dress that did not mold itself too candidly to her figure, and the deep, not too tight neckline showed the edges of a pale pastel bra. Her dull brown hair was streaked with touches of something that made her a particolored blonde. The bright color of

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her lips was uneven, and particles of it could be seen clinging to her small, crowded front teeth. Her eyes were heavily made up, and the whiteness of her throat and bare arms betrayed the intensity of the make-up on her small, sharp-featured face. Gallard presumed someone had gone to her place and brought back a change of clothing, and her cosmetics. He noticed that the polish on her nails was thick and fresh.

Nineteen, he thought. I know where they come from, but where do they go?

Well, for this one the process would be a little different. But not essentially so.

She sat down in the chair to which Gallard had escorted her. It was the one he'd been using, selected to make it easy to watch everyone in the room. He sat down awkwardly in the visitor's chair beside Mangrum's desk, holding his body very upright and keeping his feet pulled back. He let her watch Treville fidgeting and hear Mangrum's fingertips drumming softly on his desk, and then he said: "Well, Miss Chute, I'm sure you can understand why the company wishes that the last two days had happened a little differently."

Her eyes again reviewed all their expressions. "Sure," she said, her voice beginning to gain a little strength. "It's not the kind of thing you'd want getting out." Gallard said nothing, and she went on. "I mean, something like this. Where you can see tomorrow's paper, and all. If everybody knows about it, then it doesn't do you any good." Her hands closed tightly over the flap of her vinyl purse.

"What do you suppose would happen?" Gallard asked. "If it got out."

"Well, the government wouldn't let you buy any stock, I guess." She grinned. "Bookies wouldn't even talk to you." She glanced around.

Gallard chuckled. "I don't suppose they would." Treville was looking at her sourly. Mangrum, Gallard noted, was keeping a totally neutral expression, but watching him as much as her. "No, Mrs. Buchanan," Gallard said quickly to the secretary, "don't take this part down." The secretary was seated on a little stepstool beside a wall of print racks. She hadn't yet touched her pencil to her book, and sent Gallard a sharp look which he overrode with: "There's no need to write down these negotiations."

"And people would follow your investments," the girl said definitely.

Treville demanded: "What do you mean by that?"

Her first smile appeared. She sat up straighter, and she looked

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directly into Treville's eyes. It was not something he had expected, and he blinked.

"Every time you wanted to buy a piece of property," she said, "you'd have to hide who you were, or everybody would make you pay a lot. I think that's what I'd do. And even if you didn't have to pay too much, your competition would build up right with you the minute they knew what you were doing. It would all cost you a lot more than it should. You'd be harassed all the time. It's like if somebody down where I live, in that part of town, you know, bought a Corvette. You'd be all the time listening for the burglar alarm, and you wouldn't get your pleasure from it." She looked around again, but not in search of smiles. She was sitting back a little and keeping her neck straight.

"Well, now, Miss Chute," Gallard said kindly, "suppose we simply mass-produced this device and sold it to anyone. Then everyone would be even. Don't you think this company could do rather well from that position?"

She stared at him in dismay. "Oh, you wouldn't do that! You wouldn't be even —" She frowned, groping for aptness. "I mean, I thought about that part of it...." She brightened. "Sure, you'd be even. But the whole world would be odd. I mean — I can't even *imagine* what it would be like, but money wouldn't be worth *anything*, and ... and, gee, suppose you were a basketball team and you saw in the paper that you lost, well, you wouldn't even play, would you? What would that do? What would happen when it was time to print tomorrow's paper?" Her eyes grew very wide. "I just thought of that part," she said softly.

"Money wouldn't be worth anything," Gallard said.

"So you're not going to sell it to anybody, are you?" she asked. "No, you're not. I've been doing a lot of thinking, but so have you and there's more of you." She looked around the room. "You've got a big headache if people just know you have it."

"Even if we kept our Corvette locked in the garage and never drove it anywhere," Gallard agreed. He leaned forward "just as soon as word got around the neighborhood."

"What are we gonna do?" the girl asked.

Gallard smiled warmly.

"I mean it," the girl said. "What are we gonna do about me? Look at him —" She jerked her hard, pointed chin at Treville. "If looks could kill, like they say. And Mr. Mangrum wishes I would just dry up and go away. And Mrs. Buchanan —" An expression from her small girlhood crossed her face.

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" — Just can't stand it because I might get Mr. Mangrum in trouble." She took a deep breath and her eyes narrowed. She gripped her purse and plunged ahead. "I was down on Lake Wauwasee one time last summer, you know? They have this Toad Tavern there that everybody takes his boat to and buys beer. And this boy I was with was taking me over there, and in the channel there's this other boat coming the other way right next to us. And you know who I saw sitting and drinking with each other on that other boat?" She stared from Mangrum to his secretary. "And I never said a word to anybody. Because it's live and let live in this world. I mean, life's too short." She looked at Treville. "So give me a little credit, somebody."

Gallard began to laugh. He shook his head, his face coloring, and had difficulty keeping himself from being overwhelmed. He raised a hand. "Grace — Really, I'm not laughing *at* you. Grace — nevertheless, I'm going to make you an offer."

She was blushing and keeping her eyes away from Mangrum and his secretary. "Okay," she said softly.

"Mrs. Buchanan, please take this down. Miss Chute, you're in a unique position regarding certain technical developments at this division of AWC Electronics Incorporated. Call it 'the company.' Although you don't have the technical training to understand the principles and applications involved, you've demonstrated an ability to speculate on the social consequences of a device or devices stemming from these developments and all related research. Although you recognize that those devices are proprietary to the company, you have retained your right to free speculation on their theoretical effects in the marketplace. Would you allow me to describe it that way?"

"I think it makes sense."

"Thank you. Now — did you have time to do any of this kind of talking with anyone before you were asked to come up to Mr. Mangrum's office the other day?"

"Well, gee, no — I mean, Doctor Hessenbirger gave me this dime. He was laughing and joking, the way he does." She smiled. "He's nice. I mean, he likes to come up behind you and blow in your ear, but it's just how he says 'Glad to see you,' you know? Anyway, he gave it to me and said to show it around to the other girls and see what they made of it. Just for something to break up the day. I didn't know there was any big deal about it until Mrs. Buchanan came downstairs and hustled me out of there just like that. And then of course when we were all sitting here and Mr.

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Mangrum began talking serious, I started keeping my ears open." She looked at Mrs. Buchanan. "Cause it's not right, hustling people."

"No." Gallard smiled. "I'm sure we all wish we hadn't been quite so excited. Since then, you haven't discussed this with anyone except Doctor Hessenbirger and Mr. Pogrobius?"

"Well, with Knud, mostly. I haven't seen much of Doctor Hessenbirger."

"Some of us," Mrs. Buchanan said distinctly, "have seen too much of him."

Gallard sighed. "And some of us are too old to have seen everything. Let us resume. Miss Chute, it appears that in keeping with your position as an AWC employee in good standing, you have not offered your speculations to anyone outside the company, or anyone within the company who did not already know about these developments. Make that 'these subject developments,' Mrs. Buchanan. Therefore, you are in effect offering us your services as a marketing applications consultant. And as a duly authorized management representative of the company, I'm prepared to offer you certain terms of employment in that capacity. Clear so far, Grace?"

The girl cocked her head to one side. Gallard wondered if she had once sat that same way in her parents' parlor, listening to remonstrances with her hands stiff and her eyes searching, but her feet planted flat on the floor, and had gotten up at the end and moved out nevertheless. "I think I see what we're getting to," she said. "Go ahead."

"We're offering you a base annual salary of twelve thousand dollars," Gallard said, and paused to give her an eyeblink's time before he went on. "And a fringe benefit program of investments, plus the usual executive insurance benefits. The investment program is an incentive, to be funded on a one-for-one basis with your salary. The salary, of course, will rise on the normal executive review schedule.

"What it boils down to, Grace, is that if AWC's profits continue to rise, we can presume you've made a contribution to that. So for every dollar you draw in gross pay, a matching dollar will be invested for you, fifty cents in AWC stock and fifty cents in the same securities that appear in AWC's own corporate holdings portfolio. In effect, our chairman and board of directors would be your investment counselors. And our Comptroller's Division will help you with your tax returns, if you'd like. It will all grow into quite a good thing, the longer it runs."

The girl considered it with

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private little flickers of expression. "I don't know," she said thoughtfully. "We'd never get away with it around here."

Gallard grinned at her. "Grace, if I were thirty, I'd court you. We're going to send you to San Francisco, if that's all right."

"San Francisco?"

"The microwave plant; that's kind of half manufacturing and half engineering. There's a young fellow named Bob Cadwallader running things out there. You'd be reporting directly to him. I believe he has a 36-foot sailboat and drinks Olympia. Some people say it's better than Coors." He turned his expression directly into Treville's face, ignoring the suddenly dilated pupils he found there. "I wonder if that's what Elmo Daugherty meant when he admitted being over a barrel. Charles, all these arangements are agreeable to you, aren't they? Good. Mr. Mangrum, do you concur in Miss Chute's transfer? Fine — now, Grace, what do you say?"

She grinned at him. "Mr. Gallard, how did you ever get euchred out of being president? You got me." She was breathless but she was holding on. "How's — how's fifteen thousand, and everything else matches?"

Gallard turned to Mangrum. "You see, Harry? That's what they learn in the corridors, between classes. That's to teach us to respect her. Fifteen thousand it is, Grace, and we'll pay your moving expenses."

"Okay." She was suddenly on the verge of giggling. She stood up imitating a businesslike demeanor. "Is Doctor Hessenbirger going to be in trouble? Or Knud?"

"No," Gallard said.

"We all been waiting for Doctor Hessenbirger to get let go. With all the cutting down that's been happening with the junior technicians and all."

"He won't be let go, Grace. Nor Mr. Pogrobius. Their careers are safe." He ignored Mangrum and Treville.

"Well, that's good, that's okay, then," she said. But he had seen her relinquishing that surface concern from the moment he had begun reassuring her. She was nineteen, and she had sailboats in her eyes ... in time they, too, would be superseded.

"Mrs. Buchanan," he said, turning, "if you please, type that up right away, with places for Mr. Treville's signature and mine as well as Miss Chute's. Copies for everybody, copy to Cadwallader, copy to Mr. Daugherty. All confidential. You and Mr. Mangrum can sign as witnesses."

Holding herself very stiffly, the secretary left the room. Then they sat working out the last details —

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where she would stay meanwhile, when she would leave; she would take care of what she'd say to her parents — it was not a matter of moment — and so, bit by bit, it was all taken care of. Mrs. Buchanan returned with the typed agreement; he proofread it, and they all signed. Mrs. Buchanan left for her desk beside the door. Grace put her copy carefully in her purse. "Well, good by," she said, and they all shook hands. She went out the door and walked away down the corridor, another historical personage.

Treville, Mangrum and Gallard sat looking at each other. Gallard was damned if he was going to speak first; there was too much hanging in the air. Mangrum was looking down at his desktop with a crooked, thin smile. Finally, he looked up and said: "Cheap at twice the price."

Gallard shook his head. It was all right for now, and after he'd called Cadwallader and explained the situation to him, she'd be under the eye of a man with his brains about him. But she would inch it up. She was moving forward hesitantly now, but nevertheless her pace was sixty seconds per minute, and she would not be the same any longer than that permitted. The processes would take hold; the appetites would grow as the boredome set in. And the intake would determine the shape of the organism. He would not like to see her again.

Treville could understand that as well as anyone could. But that was not what made him so snappish when he said: "Mr. Gallard never works cheap."

7.

"Well, however that may be," Gallard said with a pleasant smile, "let's now go discover how Pogrobius has decided to play his stake. We'll go to him. Different strokes for different folks. Lead the way, please, Harry."

In the corridor, he took occasion to draw Mangrum aside briefly. "No sweat, Harry," he said softly. "But don't bring her with you when you move up to the General Office. Country gentlewomen discover charge accounts in the big city." He pressed lightly on Mangrum's shoulder, urging him back into the lead, and the little group made its way into the room where the draftsman was waiting.

Pogrobius had a broad, open face and massive, nearly hairless forearms protruding from his rolled-up white sleeves. He was sitting still behind a steel table, his necktie open and his suitcoat hanging over the back of the chair. He had a scratch pad on which he'd been doodling — old-fashioned flying machines, Gallard noticed,

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full of wings and wires. His eyes were tigerish green above his flat cheeks, their color undimmed by his short, straw-colored lashes.

Mangrum nodded to the junior manager type in the room. "All right, Jim," he said, "you can go get on that Matsushita proposal now," and the assistant left. Pogrobius stood up. He was the chunky, dense-bodied type, Gallard saw; there was a touch of Finn in his ancestry, and Finns are warlocks.

"Good morning," Gallard said. "I'm Clinton Gallard; you know who I am."

Pogrobius thrust out his hand. "Yes. Good morning to you." He had an abrupt way with the language. They shook hands, and Pogrobius waited again.

Gallard said: "I know what I'd want if I were you."

Pogrobius showed white, square teeth. "You have made Grace temporarily rich, correct? Would you like to try making me rich?"

Gallard shook his head.

"Will you assure me of no harm to Eduard Hessenbirger?"

"Certainly. But that's not a term."

"No, that confirms a foregone conclusion." Pogrobius repeated the quick huntsman's smile, this time adding a nod. "You know, he is a remarkable man."

Gallard said: "Yes, he is. Tell me — do we have to all sit down in this windowless compartment and negotiate, or can we reach a quick agreement and let you get back on the job?"

"Well, go ahead with your agreement."

"All right." Gallard held up his left hand and began ticking off its fingers. "First, we get a Senator to sponsor a private bill making you a citizen right away. Second, an employment contract Third, the contract is for Assistant Supervisor of Drafting, if that's what you want; something else you're qualified for if it's not."

"No, drafting is all right. I'm not educated in engineering."

"Very well. Fourth, when the bill comes through, a promotion to Supervisor. Fifth, that's contingent."

Pogrobius raised his eyebrows. His face took on a look of innocence. "Contigent on what?"

"On whether you prove to be a good assistant supervisor in Mr. Mangrum's judgment, and then as soon as he finds another honorable slot for Hazen."

"Ah. That's wise," Pogrobius said. "And you give me all this because I am the best draftsman in the division, because when you look at me it's obvious I would be a good boss."

"We're giving it to you now for obvious reasons," Gallard said. "I

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would also like to add my apologies as company representative; you should have had a chance at it sooner."

Pogrobius ran his tongue between his lip and his lower teeth. "It's good to be a friend of Eduard's."

"It's not bad to be a graduate of the Gotteborg Technical Gymnasium," Gallard said in halting Swedish. "Or to know what it is to be a team racer." In English, he said with a wink: "Don't sell America short." He shook Pogrobius's hand again. "We have an agreement, then."

"Yes," Pogrobius said.

"Excellent. I'm pleased with myself. Harry — you'll get the contract ready today, right? Put a rider on it about the citizenship thing. It'll fit, because we're picking up the tab as a contract benefit. Another thing — Mr. Pogrobius is fully entitled to suitable greater responsibilities as they come up over the years; I'm sure he'll be expecting normal consideration on his merits. Put a note in his personnel file. If he gets shafted, I'll come back and haunt this place." He did not smile. Neither did he frown.

Mangrum nodded. "Yes, sir."

"Mr. Pogrobius, it was pleasant meeting you."

Pogrobius nodded "The same for me. Eduard speaks well of you."

"Well, we understand each other."

"He said there would be very little bullshit after you arrived."

"That remains to be seen," Gallard said. "Good morning."

"You will straighten things out for him, next?" Gallard turned back from the doorway. "I'm here to straighten out things for the company."

Pogrobius blanked. Then he said: "Ah, well, it may be the same thing."

They filed out. Mangrum had offered his hand to Pogrobius and the draftsman had taken it after a steady-eyed pause. In the hallway, Gallard said: "Thank you, Harry. Some people don't know when to stop managing. But you gave those two enough time to decide what their positions were going to be, and then it was easy to tip them our way. I hate moving targets."

Mangrum shrugged. "Didn't do it deliberately."

"Perhaps not. But it appears you have a useful style. Style counts. Details follow." Gallard smiled; then so did Mangrum.

They proceeded along the hallway for a while. Treville was thin-lipped. Suddenly he put on a mock jovial air and punched Mangrum lightly on the shoulder. "Never figured you'd let somebody else shuffle one of your departments, Harry." he chuckled.

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Mangrum showed puzzlement. "Mr. Gallard has the right answers," he said. "And Pogrobius deserved it. I don't mind at all."

Treville turned on Gallard. He spread his arms broadly. "What am I going to do with this man, Clint? You've conned him and he doesn't even know it." He turned back to Mangrum. His grin was white at the corners, and his eyes were slitted. "If you'd had more chances to watch him operate when *he* was president, you'd be a harder sell."

Mangrum said slowly: "I suppose that could be." He shifted his glance toward Gallard. "What's our next move, Mr. Gallard?"

Gallard's eyes crinkled. "Well, you'd probably want to get with your engineers now. They'll want to know there's going to be an important research role for them in the coming years. And then you'll want to prime up a little for Hessenbirger's presentation. I'm going to need a little time alone with him first. So why don't you and the engineers meet us in the conference room in twenty minutes."

Mangrum nodded. "Yes, sir. Excuse me, Mr. Treville, Miss Farrier." He turned and walked away.

"Charles," Gallard remarked, "people need to feel they've cooperated in events."

Treville said huskily: "What do you mean by that?"

"You're hurting yourself."

"How?"

"You see me moving Cadwallader into position. You see me shifting Mangrum toward thinking more about managing and less about who had what prerogatives, and you're fighting it. After you retire, you'll be bitter because you fought and lost. Ease off, Charles. I told you I wasn't coming back. I'll be gone soon, and you can be president again. You'll have a few years, and you can enjoy them." Gallard's eyes were steady. He held up his hand. "Please just listen for a moment.

"Charles, in a year or two, Mangrum has to move into the General Office. He'll be thinking he's being held back. And he'll be realizing he doesn't have anything to hold him here, with his daughter graduated out of his house forever. There's only one reason why men his age fall in love with their secretaries. It's the shortest step toward one last time of being able to drink and laugh aboard a pleasure craft on a soft summer night. But that palls; it's a lot of trouble to arrange, and it takes up space in the managerial capacities of the brain. He'll have come to feel that way. But you dont have to care about any of that; you'll just want him where you can keep a closer eye

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on him. And then Cadwallader moves here, because he's in the know and because he's the best engineering manager we have. Grace will be an enormously demanding and self-indulgent problem by then. But good management will have mitigated things as much as possible, I'm sure. Everything will be proceeding handily. And you can be the good shepherd."

Treville bit his lip. He stepped forward. But then he spared one look sideward.

Gallard smiled. "Don't consider Miss Farrier a witness. She is solely my problem."

Treville said: "I can take apart anything you can build."

Gallard shook his head. "Oh, no. Then you'd need me back to put it together again. And I won't be here. I'll be where no cool breezes can reach me."

Treville opened his mouth. Then one could see him remembering with what feelings he had called Elmo Daugherty yesterday, and, looking at him with interest, Gallard could see the doom mirrored in his eyes.

"All right," Treville said. "Now you've told me."

"I wouldn't con you, Charles," Gallard said. "I wouldn't make it that easy for you, you son of a bitch."

And now you see it plainly, Gallard thought to himself, still smiling. You see it as a perfectly understandable case of revenge, and when they hand you the gold watch in a few years, that's the package you can carry it away in. "Come along, Elizabeth," he said. "Mr. Treville probably wants to try making a phone call before he joins us downstairs."

They walked away. After they had turned a corner, Gallard stopped beside a water fountain and rested one shoulder lightly against the wall. "My vision is going gray at the edges," he said, "and I'm getting a slight irregularity."

She put her middle finger against the inside of his wrist and reached into her bag with the other hand. He smiled down at her with a softening of his lips, and reached out to lightly touch her hair.

"Push your sleeve up," she said.

When they were done together, they took the elevator one flight down and walked to the conference room. Another of Mangrum's assistants was waiting outside the doors. Mangrum had called ahead and told him Gallard was coming, so the man was not surprised. He eyed calmly along Elizabeth's body until he noticed that she was rubbing the sides of her fingertips against the wet skin of her cheekbones; then he was embarrassed.

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"Would you please go and unlock Doctor Hessenbirger's laboratory," Gallard said to him. "I'll be looking in on it before the presentation." The assistant hurried away. Gallard pushed on the conference room doors.

8.

The conference room bulletin boards were spotted with exhibits and pieces of yellow legal pad paper with red felt-tip writing. Eduard Hessenbirger, wearing a long white cotton coat open over his tweed suit, sprawled in a chair he had pulled back from one end of the long table so he could throw a leg over one of its arms. He waved negligently. "Hello, Clint." he studied Elizabeth, frowned momentarily, seemed to search his mind, shrugged, and resumed smiling.

He was a long-jawed red-haired man in his forties, with knobby fingers and prominent teeth. The top of his scalp was bare; the hair at the sides was beginning to mix with white and was worn carelessly, so that pink wisps hung over the tips of his ears. There was hardly a line on his face, unless one stood very close to him. A pair of glasses with yellowing clear plastic frames rested on the bridge of his bony nose, their temples askew.

"Hello, Eduard," Gallard said absently, walking along the walls and studying the exhibits. "This is Miss Farrier. Elizabeth, Doctor Hessenbirger." He paused in front of a pinned-up first page of the Red Flash edition of the *Chicago Daily News* for April 8, 1975. He studied it for a long time and turned away. "God *is* dead," he said, "and Mickey Spillane has the position." He made his way back to where Elizabeth sat with Hessenbirger frowning at her.

"You can't see it when you're walking around in it," Hessenbirger said.

"No, I don't suppose you can," Gallard remarked as he took the chair next to Elizabeth. He glanced around the room. "Why all this stuff on the bulletin boards?"

"Ah, well, you said a presentation. So we give them the whole thing, right? The lab smock, the show and tell — after all, it's like a New Product Commitee meeting, isn't it?" Hessenbirger's eyes sparkled. He looked at Gallard conspiratorially. "The 1971 model Telechron from AWC. So, we can't call it that, but I'm sure Marketing will come up with something snappy. Meanwhile, the bean-counters from Accounting will want to know how much, so that's all over there by the fire extinquisher; all costs to date, with overhead figured in as a separate item — and Manufacturing will want to know what sort of tooling might be involved, so that's right there above

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the wastebasket, because it's all nonsense, of course. By the light switches is where Legal will find references to prior art, which is a note from me saying I don't think Herbert George Wells is in a position to sue. Sales will want to know about cabinetwork, and that's the Polaroid you see over behind the slide projector stand. And then of course there is a list of all the strong sales features — I'm particularly proud of the fact that it can easily be all-transistorized and microlithic; solid-state, we can tell the poor boobs in their little tract houses. For O.E.M., I suggest the medical supply market — no psychiatrist's office should be complete without a machine that lets you see yourself as others see you; we sell the hardware, the O.E.M. customer builds the cabinet complete with couch and security blanket, choice of pink or blue, and padded restraining straps, of course — and I also think this can be sold in kit form for the do-it-yourself people. Some of the components are presently worth hundreds of hours of handwork each, and in order to understand the directions you must discard the notion that electrons are particles in motion, when they are in fact static filaments through which time is combed, but with modern space-age technology, what sort of obstacle is that?" Hessenbirger waved his arm again, and giggled.

"What good is it?"

"Good? My friend, it takes you four years forward into the future, almost to the day. No further. Is this somehow related to the need for leap years? Good? Of what use, sir, is a newborn baby? Of course, every material application involves violations of postdated copyrights and patents, to say nothing of outright theft. But if we let it get out, perhaps all such conventions will be meaningless. We can throw out everything after Genesis and write a new set of instructions. Services — yes, perhaps it will be possible to set up service organizations which will turn a nice buck, but first I suggest we determine whether the future is as linear as the past, or whether it is multiplex, contrary to what the past appears to be. I have not run tests on what happens when you do something to contradict tomorrow's newspaper, nor am I anxious to persuade my grandson to shoot me. Good? I will underscore the obvious — the good of this device to AWC is that it has saved my job, probably gotten Knud into a better position vis-a-vis that bumbler Hazen, and made such a mess that they had to bring you back to keep this corporation the way it should be." Hessenbirger stood up and bowed. "I take full credit."

"Has it occurred to you that I

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might not have wanted to come back?"

Hessenbirger looked at him owl-eyed. "Well, my friend, you know you don't turn these things on and off like a water spigot. First you have it occur to you that a thing can be done, and then, late at night when you've become very bored with cutting and pasting the apparatus, you divert yourself by thinking what can be done with it. And then things proceed — one does not deny an idea. Otherwise, the brain gets constipated, right? And of course one thinks of the incredible stupidity of men like Treville and his cronies, and one does not hold back one's hand."

"No, I don't suppose one does," Gallard admitted. He smiled, and shook his head.

Hessenbirger had once again found a vacant space within him from which to pause and study Elizabeth. "I know you," he said slowly. "No — wait — pictures. Yes Newspaper halftones. Farrier. Let me see— you were wearing a light coat coming down some courthouse steps, so it was either spring or autumn ...."

Elizabeth raised her eyes.

Hessenbirger snapped his fingers. "Doctor Elizabeth Farrier. The clinic. Of course. Late last year." He smiled suddenly and began moving toward her, putting out his hand. "I am delighted to meet you. Truly. It is a pleasure to meet someone who fights the system. God-damned barbarians. Some of us must teach them it's not all their way. They would rather fill their slums with potential voters than do something for people. The incredible stupidity of taking away a physician's license and throwing her in jail —"

"Putting me on probation." Elizabeth said.

"Whatever. When all you were trying to do was help those girls."

"I was an abortionist," Elizabeth said as she shook his hand. "That was what I was, and that's probably what I will be again someday. Pleased to meet you, Doctor Hessenbirger." She sat back down again without having smiled. Hesenbirger looked at her awkwardly.

"We don't have a great deal of time," Gallard said. "And I want to see your machine before the engineers arrive. Can we visit your laboratory for a moment, Ed?"

"Oh, sure. Come on. Let's go."

The three of them went down along the corridors leading toward the back of the building. Gallard said: "How does it work, Ed?"

"Oh, that. Well, it's rather interesting. First of all, it moves only into the future; I have no method for reaching the past, although I've thought about it some and made a few attempts. I suspect

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the past is linear. Putting it another way, I can't comb back against the nap. That may not be quite the same thing.

"Then, there is some sort of drag. I think there may be conservation of entropy. But it takes twenty minutes objective time to get back from the four year limit, and from beyond four years, nothing gets back at all. I made some animal experiments and so forth. I suspect we will need some sort of amplifier to travel farther; I think what happens is that we are on a sort of teeter-totter, in which the forward trip, down the entropy gradient, puts sufficient energy into the system to allow a slower rebound to the starting point, but then returns diminish exponentially. I think things fall short — perhaps they return to the coordinates of this point in space, but at the wrong time. Of course, this thing might thus become an interstellar-traveling vehicle, but we are quite some time away from making an application of that, I think."

Gallard shook his head. "What can I say? You're a very important man."

"No more or less than I was a few years ago." Hessenbirger grinned. "Of course, I have never sold myself short."

"What's it like? How did you get the newspapers and things?"

Walking along beside Gallard, Hessenbirger shrugged. "Nothing to it. I arrive, so to speak, in the laboratory. The machine is there; I leave the lab, go the reception area, us the pay phone to call a cab, and I go downtown to the big newsstand. I pay for everything with the perfectly legal money in my pocket, and they give me change. I take the cab back, I go to my laboratory, and I throw the switch the other way. It's exactly like any other trip, except that I have consumed twenty minutes of 1971 time, without respect to time spent in 1975. If I see somebody in the halls, I smile and nod and keep going. I am the eccentric Doctor Hessenbirger and no one speaks to me until spoken to."

"You're not waiting for yourself?"

"No, and I don't think I ever will be. In my life, I've from time to time caught unwarned glimpses of myself in what I didn't know was a mirror. And every so often my acquaintances point out people they swear look and act just like me. I'm sure it happens to everyone; the world's gene pool is large, but finite. I have never enjoyed it; have you?"

"I've been startled."

"Yes, that's one way to put it. At any rate, I intend to keep careful schedules. Of course, sometime, as a very careful experiment... per-

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haps I'll become curious whether two heads are better than one. But I think I'll wait until I have something very serious to discuss. Otherwise, it's just onanism, you know? Well, here we are. Wait — I'll get the light switches ... Doctor Farrier, after you ...."

Hessenbirger's area was a large room beyond the office and work rooms used by the engineers. It was in the usual state of clutter, with all sorts of equipment Gallard did not understand, though he had the vocabulary to give perhaps accurate names to most of it. Gallard stood in the doorway, looking at the pegboard booth, into which wires led in neatly taped bundles.

Hessenbirger waved toward it.

"There it is," he said. "Ta-ra! Step this way, lady and gentleman ...." He walked over to the wall and pushed the three-pronged plug back into the outlet. He dusted his hands as he straightened. "Well, that's it. Greater than fire or the wheel, but perhaps not as elegant to the eye."

Gallard said: "I don't understand how the power goes into the future with you."

"Oh, it does and it doesn't. First of all, it gives me the initial surge that lets me go over the edge of the entropy gradient, so to speak. All the time I'm traveling, the system is loading with energy because I'm traveling from a universe with a higher energy level. When I arrive in 1975, the heat-death is four years closer, after all. All the machine here has to do is maintain tuning; it draws only as much power as it needs to keep itself operating — it doesn't really do any of the work. Meanwhile, I arrive in 1975 with the contents of the booth, which include the controls. The controls are synchronized to the system; when I want to return, I have access to the accumulated energy, which of course is back here in time. It can't be in 1975, because that would change the 1975 entropy level, and it would be absurd. It doesn't matter whether the machine is powered in 1975, and as a matter of fact, it isn't. I assume there's another machine somewhere that is reaching 1979, or perhaps even farther. Even if I powered up this machine in 1975, I couldn't use it to reach another four years, because the only controls belong to 1971. There can't be anything already inside the booth when I arrive, or there would be things attempting to occupy each other's space, you see? Even so, there is some body heat, and a rather dramatic puff of wind, but nothing insupportable. These are all aspects that can be explored; there is ramification enough for a dozen careers."

"I certainly suppose so,"

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Gallard agreed. He glanced at his watch. "I've put some things in motion," he said. "I hope Bob Cadwallader will be the manager here by 1974 at the latest. Perhaps sooner."

Hessenbirger grinned his appreciation. "Good! Very good!" He smiled and shook his head. "So I did do a good job for us, then. I thought to myself that a sly old fox like you could make something useful of all this."

Gallard smiled back. "I do the best I can, for a man who can't foretell the future."

"Would you like to go? It's ridiculously simple."

"No — no, not now. We have a meeting in five minutes. Treville is trying to get Elmo Daugherty to rescind my arrangements; I have some very difficult moments ahead of me, and I want to meet them on time."

He leaned his shoulder against the doorframe and rubbed his hand over his eyes. "Elizabeth," he said, "do you have anything in that magic bag for me?"

"You're ill!" Hessenbirger said. "I didn't know that!"

Gallard shook his head. "I'm not ill. I'm dying. Too many things have shut off in my arteries. Even with Doctor Farrier, it's just a matter of time. But I'll be all right in a moment. I function." He looked up and smiled at Hessenbirger. "I do it all in increments, you see, and somehow they add up to a day or two at a time."

Elizabeth was taking his pulse and looking searchingly into his face.

"One thing," Gallard said over her shoulder.

"What?"

"Is the machine ready? If you could go out to the 1975 reception room, and see who's listed as manager in the interoffice phone book ...."

"Yes, I can do that," Hessenbirger said.

"I'd appreciate it. I'll go to the conference room and fight a delaying action until you get there."

Hessenbirger's excitement shone through his concern. "Of course! Drama! The messenger from Marathon! It doesn't matter what you say or do, Gentlemen, the accomplished fact is as follows. Zum! We got 'em right here!" He held up his hand, palm up, fingers curled. He turned toward the machine. He laughed suddenly and stripped off the ludicrous coat, tossing it aside. He busied himself in the booth.

"Mr. Gallard," Elizabeth said softly, "you're not having an episode of any sort. There's a slight acceleration of the pulse, but —"

"Hush, darling," Gallard said.

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9.

Gallard and Elizabeth made their way back up the hallways, ignoring the confusion in the darkened offices. The power failure was confined to this wing of the building, and in due corse they reached the lights of the conference room. Looking in through the doorway, Gallard could see the four engineers and Mangrum studying the walls. Treville was waiting in the hall.

"Where's Hessenbirger?" he asked.

"He'll be along. What did Elmo tell you, Charles?"

"He said he'd review the situation. He wants you to call him as soon as this presentation's over." Treville smiled tautly. "One thing you've done for us, Clint. By cooling out Pogrobius and that Chute girl, you've given us time to think over if we meant what you said to them. And they'll be fat, dumb and happy meanwhile, because they got it straight from the great Gallard's mouth."

"Ah. All right — let's go in."

"How soon is Hessenbirger going to get here? Look at this crap he's got put up! What does he think this corporation is — a joke?"

"No. Neither does he consider himself fit to be taken lightly. He's no different from you or me, Charles." He smiled in a kindly manner, and pressed lightly against Treville's arm to move him into the room.

"That could be," Treville said, "but you've got him boxed in for us, and that's what counts. He made a big splash, but you scooped all the water back in the bucket for us. There's only him to deal with now; nobody's going to talk, nobody's going to rock any boats. If we tell him we're going to want things a certain way —"

"No fear, Charles," Gallard said. "The next four years will see most of your policies in full force. And after that, what do you care? You and your poor circulatory condition can retire to Arizona, and what strangers do to your company won't seem inportant at all." He brushed by Treville and stepped into the room. "Gentlemen," he said. "You are going to be very important to this company over the coming years. You can ignore that twaddle on the bulletin boards. Concentrate on the existing research notes and the engineering memos; and of course you can study Doctor Hessenbirger's equipment all you wish, as long as you don't disturb the arrangment of the operator's booth itself. On April 8, 1975, and then on the 10th, you will keep clear of the labs. On the 10th, at about this time, I suggest a responsible company representative be in the reception room. Perhaps he'd better be there

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a little ahead of time, just to be sure."

Gallard sat down. Everyone was watching him. "Tell Doctor Hessenbirger not to attempt to return to 1971. I pulled the plug. That backlashed a lot of energy into the system; he had shunts built into it, but it still blew all the fuses in the east wing. His power source is gone." Gallard looked around him at the other men, his smile ending directed at Treville. "I don't suppose it really matters if he's met in 1975 or not; he's there now, and he can't travel into the past. But it would be polite, not to say potentially useful, to be courteous to him. He'll be angry enough as it is." He closed his eyes and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "It's all done, Charles," he said. "And can't be undone. And the company has four years to think about it."

10.

Elmo Daugherty's voice on the phone had to compete with the sound of departure announcements and the shuffle of feet in the narrow concourse. Gallard leaned as far as he could into the open, three-side booth with its symmetrically drilled metal facings. "Well, Elmo, it's just a matter of having the better brains in the company begin working out subsidiaries and spin-off companies that will go into the new markets. You've got four years to set up the new format, and in 1975 he drops right into it and it's Gung Ho for glory. You have time to set up the right kind of connections with the government, so there won't be any problems about licensing or federal regulation or anything like that; you'll have what you want, and you can give away the rest and take credit for philanthropy."

"I saw all that the minute I heard about what you did."

"Yes, well, we're all businessmen, Elmo. We can see our hands in front of our faces. All you have to do is keep Hessenbirger happy — which he will be, of ocurse, particularly if no one crosses what he thinks is right — and let him work on it. By 1980 or so, everything we touch now will be golden. And if you hurry and make it public as much before that as you can, Grace Chute won't quite be the major stockholder yet."

"I wasn't planning to be here in 1980."

"Neither am I, Elmo. Hold on tight. Leave memos where they can be found. Address them to trustworthy heads."

A crackle interrupted the canned music from the speakers, and the Caribbean flight was called.

"Where are you, Clint?" Elmo asked quickly. "I thought you'd be coming up to see me."

"Whatever for, Elmo? You owe

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me one day's consultation fee. Just deposit two hundred dollars in my bank account." He hung up the phone, turned, and smiled at Elizabeth. He offered her his arm. They began to walk up the concourse. Gallard's footsteps were sure and regular. He looked up at nothing in particular, winked, and made a jerking motion of his free hand. He began to laugh. Elizabeth cast him an anxious glance. Gallard stopped capering and smiled at her, fondly. He was already, however, beginning to think of DC-3s, and then of tall white cruise ships, and of a narrow winding street of steps that led to the house where they played music on Victrolas with hand-joined, beautifully varnished boxes, nickelled cranks, and fluted horns like Morning Glories confused by the light from the great chandeliers and thus mistakenly uttering praise of a new day.

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22nd Century Zoologist, from p. 103

the first animal produced was for the audiences of the turf. The sport of kings was far more lucrative than the butcher shop. After all, there were still chickens.

Other varieties of saddle rabbit illustrated in the article are the Shetland Ponyrabbit (the individual in figure 2 is my daughter's pet Thumper) and the great Draftrabbit. Although no longer used in farming these were commissioned from Heydt by a well known brewer whose advertising department refused to abandon their traditional image. (Figure 3 is Champion buck Clydesrabbit Thunderbunny of Longhaul.)

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Books

ALGIS BUDRYS

Dhalgren, Samuel R. Delany, Bantam, $1.95

Women of Wonder, Pamela Sargent, ed., Vintage, $1.95

Here we are, alone together and possibly strangers.

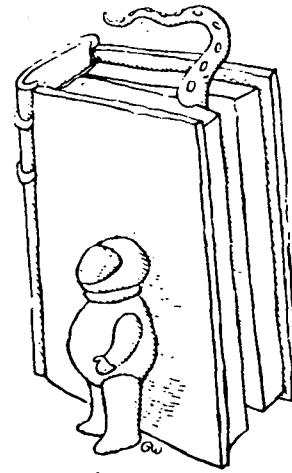
I know who you are. Trust me. Who am I? Well, I'm of the opinion that my purpose here is to recommend reading to you, to state my reasons, to shed light on larger relevant good things, to embattle error shrewdly, and to refrain from inventing my facts.

I don't know what such a person is called.

I am not a critic. Critics consider litrature as a branch of progress toward human self-knowledge. They thus perform a valuable function, and I'm flattered to be on the Pilgrim Award committee which recognizes them for it. But what you and I do here is something else.I pass you reading matter, and you look at me askance.

I am not a book reviewer. Reviewers perform for bare spaces on coffee tables and for children in pressing need of a school "book report." The best reviewers spare all necessity of reading.

What it is, I think, is that you and I and all our other kinsmen are here waiting between trains in a small town on the windward slope of Parnassus. I don't smoke anymore, I really shouldn't eat as much as I already have, and it would be unseemly to drink or make love here among the



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travelling bags and the hard old benches. So let's talk.

Let's talk about Samuel R. Delany and star quality.

Star quality is that thing which makes one personally considerable. Among writers it appears, if ever, before skill, and it conditions skill as surely as being lefthanded. No one but his investment counsellors cares what Arthur Hailey thinks when he's not writing *Airport*. Irving Wallace is not expected to speak sensibly, but simply to drop famous names into his anecdotes. Norman Mailer, on the other hand, can embellish a West Point political science lecture, call it *The Naked and the Dead*, and never sleep unobserved thereafter. The ability to sell a lot is therefor not one of the meaningful tests. Star quality is the effect of deportment.

How Samuel R. ("Chip") Delany carries himself has been of intense interest ever since he hove over the horizon about ten years ago. He has written some truly attractive prose, most of it science fantasy. More important has been his ability to attract judgment; to win not only awards but perisitent critical attention; to be taken seriously from the very start. His failures have not been interpreted as fatal shortcomings but as measures of excellence to come.

Aptly enough, the major recurring theme of his work has been the progress of the Magic Kid ... the divine innocent whose naive grace and intuitive deftness attract the close attention of all, and the love of many. In novel after novel, the Kid, under whatever name, has set out to have his adventures on the road to anywhere, bearing only an instrument and a willingness to take lessons. The instrument began as a machete drilled to also be a flute. It has gradually become less a means of expression and more a device of argument. The Kid himself has become a little more sapient with each book; the intuitive smile has tended to come in on cue.

Some years ago, Delany suddenly wrote *Nova*, a very good science fiction novel in which this theme is sublimated in a hard-driving yet tenderly plotted narrative, so that Delany could be seen to understand counterpoint as well as melodic line. *Nova* is the best novel Theodore Sturgeon never wrote; a master's controlled exercise in storytelling.

It was a welcome gift to the audience. We are often promised science fiction — that is, drama made more relevant by social extrapolation — but we rarely get more than a glimpse of it, for it is very hard to do roundly. Clearly Sturgeon's spiritual heir, Delany appeared to have set his feet on a

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new path that would lead to all sorts of good things for us all.

What I overlooked in thinking those thoughts at the time was that there is no reason why Delany had to be looking at the same clock the rest of us were.

Based on *Nova*, it was an easy thought that Delany was out to accomplish what Sturgeon has not quite done — wed science fiction to the main body of literature via pulp euphuism. This would be a very good and useful trick. Although euphuism is not the mode in which many might prefer to have it happen, such a wedding — under whatever gun will shoot — must take place soon if it is ever to happen at all.

If it does not happen, some pernicious misconceptions will have entrenched themselves where there were once some pretty places.

The pulps are where what one might call speculative science fiction fled for nurture while the main body of "proper" literature took up something one might call didactic SF. If we deny the pulps, we deny more than clumsy technique, not realizing that all technique is mere convention. We deny sometimes profound creativity, ocasional perfect insights, and frequently high intelligence. We deny, now and then, technique which is undeniably beautiful both by currently fashionable standards and, more important, by its own. And we once again set up H. G. Wells as a straw oaf, awarding another round to nihilism in its clever plastic disguise as Aldous Huxley. All these are matters which ought to be challenged and worthily debated.

But the compulsion to test this case is generally absent from the current crop of established SF writers, each of whom is aware he is free to turn the swifter trick at any time. That is to repudiate pulp SF entirely, and launch oneself full-blown from the brow of (rarely) Wells, (usually) Huxley, and (increasingly) Lewis (C. S., not Sinclair).

This is to make the assertion that nothing existed between 1925 and one's own birthdate; to claim that the man is not descended from the child, and that one was found, stainless and naked, under a fresh sheepskin, clutching one's first story check like the midwife's ring in one's fist. It is a claim to singularity, and, indeed, so singular that it requires constant reinforcement from all others who make it for themselves. It's a rather schizzy way to go about one's days upon the coil.

In Samuel R. Delany's huge new book (*Dhalgren*, Bantam Book #Y8554, 879 pp, $1.95, paper original), in other words, the Magic Kid is back. He is amnesiac — as

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well he should be — dirty, *enchaine*, polymorphous diverse, and he limps, one shoe off and one shoe on, into the arbitrary universe. The arbitrary universe in this particular case is the city of Bellona, where all is forever burning, falling, changing its address, and where time is whatever the *Bellona Times* runs as a date (or where the *bellona Times* gives whatever date the Kid is living in today).

I cannot tell you much about this book, because its interminable overt events are simply episodes on the Kid's *curriculum vitae*, and yet, 879 pp later, he is the same Kid who arrived on p 1. If you are familiar with *S.S. San Pedro* or *Castaway*, both novels of the pre-War era by James Gould Cozzens — that flaming avant-gardist — and if you have also read *The Autobiography of Lenny Bruce*, you have in effect read everything *Dhalgren* has to teach you.

Obviously, what is important about this book is what it has to teach Delany, who is still writing it. Bantam, and Frederik Pohl, Bantam's SF editor, are letting Delany make running changes in the test as they occur to him.*

**Pohl tells me the changes are not massive, but persistent. They will not be identified as changes. You may simply assume that later printings are variorum editions of the earlier ones, collectors please note. —AJB*

This otherwise impractical production method is justified by the fact that *Dhalgren* is fabulously profitable. Every Kid in the world is apparently set on having a copy in his jeans. It is to be hoped that none of them is Charles Manson.

Permit me to sum up. First of all, and not particularly to its discredit one way or another, this book is not science fiction, or science fantasy, but allegorical quasi-fantasy on the Cozzens model. Thus, although it demonstrates the breadth of Delany's education, and many of its passages are excellent prose, it presents no new literary inventions. Third, it seems clear the author knows all this, and is not primarily concerned with advancing literary technique or the ability of literature to advance its readers. It is Delany concerned with getting the message clear to himself.

I can think of worse things to do with one's time. But since this is only the latest and largest in a (virtually) unbroken series, one assumes his memory for what he says is poor, transient, and failing.

There is not enough room in this column — there may not be enough room in this magazine—for the essay one could write as a result of exposure to *Women of Wonder*, "Science Fiction Stories by Women about Women, edited, with an

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introduction and notes, by Pamela Sargent."

First of all, it's an anthology containing few clinkers and many stories well worth reading. Among the latter are Katherine MacLean's "Contagion," Sonya Dorman's "When I was Miss Dow," "Baby, You Were Great" by Kate Wilhelm, "Sex and/or Mr. Morrison" by Carol Emshwiller, "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow" by Ursula K. LeGuin," "Nobody's Home" by Joanna Russ, Kit Reed's "The Food Farm," and Vonda N. McIntyre's "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand."

But it is not an excellent anthology. Some of the selections of stories — one in particular — are highly questionable. The reason why this is especially noteworthy here is that Sargent's editorial motive is to be polemical, rather than entertaining. The stories here are used only incidentally to divert, empathize with, or parade before the reader. They are blows against the masculine SF establishment, as Sargent positions them here in her introduction and notes. Appropriately enough, she uses the sledgehammer approach as basic to her method of argument. And either because this leaves no room for subtlety of understanding, or because Sargent's grasp of the history of her chosen genre really is not quite good enough, the effect is to propose a series of inaccuracies, of injustices not only to SF but to several female writers, and one startlingly large confusion.

Now, Vintage — as distinguished from its sister, Ballantine — is the to-be-taken-seriously paperback arm of Random House. The reader can see this from the absence of color stain on the cut edges of the product. Book columnists — and of course Vintage sends review copies to a far broader list than Ballantine would — receive an accompanying news release, easy to crib from if one is in a hurry or a trifle bewildered by this new thing, Sci-Fi. In fact, that is the essential purpose of such a public relations piece — to enable the ignorant to appear knowledgeable without too blantantly being unpaid shills for the publisher. This one quotes, among others, Thomas N. Scortia, who is said to say:

"The humanizing influence of the feminine mind is nowhere more clearly shown than in the works of these talented writers who have brought a dimension to science fiction that the all-male genre has never before displayed."

One cannot hold an editor responsible for what comes out in a news release. But Sargent's introduction seems to indicate that she, too, does not distinguish between the quality of being female and that display of culturally defined attributes which comprises "femi-

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ininity." The vague position she takes is not as cryptochauvinist or as meretricious as the floe on which Scortia stands in his enthusiasm, but it *is* much vaguer, and this central inability to understand her own supposed premises gets Sargent into terminal trouble. But we shall come to that. Meanwhile, although much more could be said about the damn lie toward the end of the Scortia quote, a glance at the original copyright dates for these stories shows Judith Merril checking into the genre in 1948, an early MacLean dated 1950, and a steady progression up through the 50s and 60s into the 1970s. Charter readers of this 26-year-old publication will additionally recall that Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComás, the founding editors, were assiduous in bringing new female writers into the genre, and a glance into the *Index of Science Fiction Magazines* shows a steady appearance of female bylines throughout that period in all the SF periodicals. Memory and common sense confirm that similar frequency marks publication in the paperback and trade book markets. So it becomes difficult to perceive *what* science fiction was "all male," even before Sargent begins ticking off a list of prior-to-1948 names.

She has her own view of the matter — less drastic, perhaps more extreme:

"No doubt some of this [male chauvinism] has its roots in the origins of American sf (as opposed to serious world sf), designed, for all its scientific pretensions, as primarily an escapist literature for men and boys."

This tissue of conscious and unconscious prejudices is one of the reasons why one might not only write a book in response to Sargent's and Vintage's assertions, but one might readily see a need for a definitive history of pulp SF before all our memories fade in favor of this kind of nonsense from every polemicist who comes along with a mission. Meanwhile, I defy even Stanislaw Lem and his partisans to produce evidence for a body of 'serious world SF', independent of but contemporaneous with 'American SF' which is substantial, free of conventionalized attitudes and, more to the point, reflective of that enlightened attitude toward women which Sargent appears to seriously believe exists somewhere in the world outside America.

One feels a certain constraint in discussion with any person who substitutes 'as opposed to' for 'as distinguished from.' There was a time when, for three or four years athwart 1942, the SF of *Astounding's* "Golden Age" was generally written by white middleclass male graduates of essentially male

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technical academies, responding to the pressures of the Depression. Their notions of woman were formed by their culture and by the literature catering to that culture; consequently, some noteworthy SF is chauvinistic where it attempts to be verisimilitudinous, and the attitudes of a great many male SF writers and editors toward women are as distinguished from the grotesqueries characteristic of other generations and cultures, and from the grotesqueries of women toward men.

The essence of pulp writing, however, is that it was primarily an escape *for its writers* from the manifold grotesqueries which any intelligence encounters in childhood. Fostered by a time when there was no budget for liberal arts scholarships, pulp writing in general is the autodidactic product of people who got their degrees either in the respectable ("secure," "lucrative") professions or at the school of hard knocks. It *represents* reality to its aficionados, speaking to the things that were lost in exchange for lying promises of hope to come. Consequently rigid in its conventions, it is evidently different from some other forms of literature that *discuss* life, speaking to the acquired education. Pulp writing is as difficult to learn as Kubuki; its author is Aristophanes as distinguished from Moliere.

In a world in which it was much easier for boys than girls to run away from the good folk at home and get tattooed across the knuckles, a pulp writer must stand in awe of a fellow practitioner who is female. That is what is meant when such people say of Leigh Brackett, for example, that she 'writes like a man.' Sargent says they say 'writes *as well as* a man,' but this is not the only point Sargent misses, and far from her only distortion of fact. She not only fluffs off Brackett, as she must, with a sneering reference to *machismo* and a woefully incomplete list of her credits, she manages to crucially mis-synposize C.L. Moore's "No Woman Born," a science fiction landmark from the early 1940s.

If you do not know this story, you should. Sargent should have it here instead of "That Only a Mother..." In it, a female singer-dancer named Dierdre, badly burned in a fire, is given a new metal body consisting of rings, tapered to limbs, held and directed by the fluent energies of her life force. This utterly graceful creature, though deprived of many sensual pleasures and accomplishments, sings now as no woman born has ever sung, and dances as only she can.

Sargent goes on to tell us that she thus establishes her individual-

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ity and creativity despite the chauvinistic fears and denigrations of the male characters associated with her. End of story.

But this is not what happens. What does happen is exactly what the men fear in their concern for this hitherto untried prosthetic therapy and for the individual who finds this new freedom after crippling shock and months of immobilized agony. Dierdre sings and dances; she creates. But the therapy is a tragic failure; only Dierdre fails to hear the onset of metal in the timbre of her voice.

Now, I take the stand that the nature of intelligence does not correlate significantly with its reproductive plumbing. That is of course my counterassertion to the Scortia position, and the basis of my quarrel with Sargent when she attacks Brackett on principle for writing in a particular way. I cannot find anything in C.L. Moore's work over the years to indicate that she believes differently on that score than I do. Still, a case might be made that Moore is allegorizing an assertion of *intrinsic* "femininity" deriving from physical structure.

I don't think so. I think Dierdre is carefully characterized to set up a situation in which her human

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artist's drive to perform at the top of her potential is seen, in these special circumstances, to be making her less human (as distinguished from a narrower concern for "femininity"). The point is clearly open to argument, but Sargent goes nowhere near it in any case, preferring the cheaper shot of her less accurate reading.

Sargent's most revelatory shot is in selecting and honoring the Merril in this context. What "That Only a Mother..." says about women is that the unique essence secreted by feminine intelligence under stress is paranoid schizophrenia; that in reference to the same child in the same situation, the father is 'analytical' and the mother is 'intuitive.' Finding it here is like finding Troy at work on its own horse.

Merril went on after this story to found and aggrandize the steaming-wet-diaper school of SF, which in many examples defines and dramatizes women as beings whose "sensitivity and humanism" are at constant odds with something inherently messy in their bodies. In addition to direct imitators male and female, she inspired offshoots such as Margaret St. Clair's Oona-and-Jik sitcom stories, and the Vilbar-party imitation ladies' slick fiction of Evelyn E. Smith.

No artist should be held to ideological account for creative work sincerely done. It is hard enough to fight off the cumulative weight of one's assertive peers and righteous elders long enough to utter a few words of one's own. But there is no way to read Merril's prominence in the 1950s except as an expression of shibboleth and sexism, and a disaster to any believable ideology of the unique in women, much less of their right to simply go about doing whatever damned well pleases. To find Sargent missing that point now is to muse on how close she came to calling this book *Ladies of Wonder.*

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Ward Moore's first new story here in more than ten years, in which the well known author of "Lot," "Bring the Jubilee" and many others takes on a classic fantasy theme with delightful results.

Wish Fiddle

by WARD MOORE

Donathon Vollander had been an easygoing man, generally satisfied with life, until some time after he turned sixty. "What the devil," he asked himself irritably aloud, "does it all amoung to? Forty years with my nose to the grindstone, and what have I got to show for it? Neither wife nor child. A ten-year-old car, a thousand dollars in the bank, a so-called studio apartment without room enough for an easel or a model — much less both — a wad of rent receipts, and the prospect of a meager pension." As his outrage at the accumulation of injustices which had been put upon him mounted, his litany of wrongs lapsed into inaudibility, the memory of his deprivations crowded into his mind too fast for speech; he reviewed them in silent bitterness.

He had never fired a shot in anger (or in any other state of emotion); no important war or police action or pacification or defense of any small, peace-loving, democratic country had occurred during his years of maturity. No maddeningly enticing woman had ever moaned, groaned, or cried out in unbearable ecstasy as he pressed his naked body to hers (his lovelife had, in fact, been singularly unimpassioned and mercantile, and though he had at one period escorted a young lady named Angela Fairway, employed as he was by the Department of Motor Vehicles, for snacks at drive-ins and afterward to movies, nothing had come of it even though she had once touched his cheek with her fingertips and he had clamped a hand on her leg just below her knee and thought hesitantly of asking her to become engaged). He had not been in a fight since grammar school, never been held up, or arrested (except twice by the highway patrol for going too slow).

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He had never been outside California save once to Tijuana, once to Oregon, and three times to Nevada. Other men dreamed of building bridges, painting erotic pictures, writing pornography, but he could look back only on quickly abandoned violin lessons when he was eight or nine.

He had never been on a ship, plane, or train, never gambled except cautiously with the dime slot machines in Reno, never been to a corrida, horserace, or ballgame, never gotten drunk, smoked pot, joined a demonstration, signed a petition, or failed to contribute to the community chest. In short, his life had been a desert and a desolation. (He did not turn to Ecclesiastes, having prejudice against religion, about which he knew little, because he felt a rational man in an age of reason must necessarily reject anything "supernatural," it having been proven in the middle of the nineteenth century that all was chance. Besides, on Sundays he washed and polished his car.)

"It's devilish hard," he said, resuming his musings aloud. "Devilish hard."

It must not be assumed that this was anything but an idle manner of speech, for he was that type of skeptic who was not skeptical at all — that is, he questioned nothing, having accepted all the currently approved notions from the belief that supply and demand, not conspiracy, regulated prices, to a touching faith in progress, there being no heaven or hell in his cosmos, only one vast, gray limbo. This manner of speech came then, not from any acknowledgement of the existence of Satan, Mephistopheles, Beelzebub, Asmodeus, Lucifer, or The Adversary, but from Donathon's long-established custom of reading historical novels laid in the Regency period in which devil and devilish were props as fixed as Johnnie Walker's knobheaded stick or Eustace Tilley's quizzing glass. In another man this might have been an affectation, but to Donathon they were almost as unself-conscious as they would have been to Byron, Brummell, Caroline Lamb, or Prinny himself at Brighton, or as freaky, way out, or funky to a contemporary.

In this mood of vexed melancholy, he thought of his one experience with the "creative" world — his childish and curtailed violin lessons. He still had that fiddle, not because he had any emotional attachment to it, or becuase it was an instrument of high value or exceptional tone, but simply because he was not one to throw away anything lightly and not having moved in forty years — since, in fact, he had first gone to work for the DMV — he had never

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been forced to weed out the things which were simply not worth the trouble and expense of hauling from one place to another. Further, he knew exactly where to put his hands on it, for it was stored in his cramped part of the apartment house garage.

Moved by some hazy impulse the next morning, which was not a working day, he carefully wiped the thick dust off the imitation leather of the violin case. Sneezing, he carried the case to his apartment, which in reality was nothing more than a middle-size room with kitchen shelves, sink, stove, and refrigerator hidden from the "living and sleeping areas" by a plywood and plastic divider actually concealing nothing from anyone, and a bathroom (shower, no tub) designed by an undersized midget for full-grown elves.

Laying the case on the only table, he unsnapped the catches, which had become so corroded they had to be violently pried apart. Donathon noted with satisfaction that neither dust nor moisture seemed to have seeped into the instrument itself, for the varnish gleamed — albeit somewhat dully — and there were no obvious signs of deterioration. Except that all four strings had snapped and were coiled up like so many tiny snakes.

Again moved by no satisfactorily reasonable impulse he returned to the garage, got into his car, and drove down to the nearest music store. Here he bought not only a full set of strings, but a beginners' instruction book. He was soon glad of this, since he would not have been able to string the fiddle properly without it, having forgotten the order in which the strings were arranged. Taking the pitch pipe from its velour-covered trap in the narrow end of the case, he tuned the violin as best he could, which was not very well, for the pegs were stubborn, and his ear was not good.

The bow had been correctly loosened before being put away, and though many of the horsehairs were broken, it was not beyond use when tightened and rosined. Tucking the instrument under his jaw, he raised the bow, and feeling somewhat self-conscious, essayed a scale.

The screeeeek was unendurable, even to his ear. He ran the bow over the G string; this sound, while less than celestial, did not seem designed to shatter empty wineglasses.

He tried again: G D A E. Following the book, he now managed to produce B F sharp and C sharp. Recklessly he embarked on Merrily We Roll Along. A ghastly, unearthly squeak issued from the fiddle.

He remembered now: this had

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been one of the failings which had led to the abandonment of the lessons. Unless he concentrated mightily, the violin drooped, and his fingers held the bow at an angle which produced that excruciating sound. It had been hard if not impossible to correct. Even with the teacher patiently reminding him and correcting his position, after a few clear notes the vice reasserted itself, and any listening ears were anguished. Evidently time hadn't cured this tendency. How could it?

He was about to put the violin back in its case and, new strings or no new strings, put it away again for another forty or more years, when on pure whim, he tried the E string again. Surely this was an unblemished, clear tone? Now for another go at Merrily We Roll Along, carefully, watchfully guarding against a wrong angle or disastrous tilt.

But care and watchfulness were not enough. As soon as he took his full attention from the way he was holding the bow and put it on the music, the hideous wail sounded again. "The devil!" exclaimed Donathon Vollander, biting his lip angrily.

There was no clap of thunder, no glare of red light, no smell of sulfur. After all, we hear and see and smell selectively: Donathon Vollander the skeptic, the scientific rationalist, could not have allowed the intrusion of any of these stagy effects into his anticlerical life. Clap of thunder? Thunder is so rare in most of California that children have grown to parenthood without hearing it. Glare of red light? With police cars chasing vicious criminals (flag defacers with ecology decals, "hippies" who lived, male, female, and intermediate in communes together), who could fail to be blinded nightly with their red flashers? As for sulfur (brimstone?), who kept track of all the new deodorants? Leather, Irish Mist, Beached Whale, Dog Dew — why not Infernal Sulfur?

The devil had no horns, wasn't even dressed in red with blackened face; nor did he wear a mask or buckle breeches. It was true that his sinuous tail ended in a sharp arrowhead, and the tabii and zorri on his left foot had clearly been made especially to accommodate a cloven hoof. He wore pink bellbottom trousers with stylized black daisies printed all over them, a turtleneck sweater and a foulard neckerchief. He did not look malignant at all. Just weary, and frightfully, *frightfully* bored. "You called, I think?" he murmured languidly, in exactly the tones Donathon associated with a Regency beau.

"Me?" asked Donathon, his grammar, never shatterproof, breaking up.

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"You wanted something," persisted the devil. "I'm rarely mistaken."

"Look," said Donathon, "this is all a lot of medieval hokum. You're going to offer me anything I want in return for my soul. But I don't believe you exist, and I don't believe in souls. So obviously we can't do business."

The devil, fussily arranging his tail so as not to sit on it, took the only vacant chair in the cooking area. "Oh, mutual trust and confidence have never been essential to striking a bargain. Believe in souls? *I* don't believe in virtue. Yet without virtue where would I be? Back in the Garden, running an unprofitable fruit business.

"Anyway, take it from me, you have a soul. I can see it in a certain light if I come close enough. I admit it's no great shakes as souls go, and to talk about selling it is as foolish as speculating on the vitamin content of Behemoth and Leviathan. Indeed, I wouldn't accept it as a gift."

Donathon, who a moment before had his face set hard against selling his soul, was now quite miffed at this cavalier appraisal. "If you don't want to buy," he said, huffily, "why all this palaver about wishes?"

The Adversary smiled sweetly — and it must be admitted his was a smile of overwhelming charm — "My dear fellow, can't we let it go that I want simply to gain merit for an evil deed?"

"I suppose you mean a good deed?"

"Do you? Well, well, it has been my fate to be understood only by great writers. Shaw and Milton; lesser mortals are baffled. But come, I mustn't take up too much of your time. Just tell me what I can do for you now you've summoned me."

"Isn't it customary for you to grant me three wishes?"

The devil smiled tiredly. "Unworthy, unworthy," he murmured. "Did you work out that trick by yourself, or has it become traditional by now? I grant you three wishes, but one is quite enough, for what do you do? Why, your first wish is to wish for three more wishes, or a hundred, or a thousand — or simply for the grant of every wish you may make. Come, surely you can do better than that?"

"I wasn't trying to take advantage of you," said Donathon stiffly.

"Why not? Everyone else does; it's the usual thing. 'Putting one over on the devil,' they call it. And, of course, being so evil and trusting, I always fall victim. It's everyone for himself and the angels take the hindmost, isn't it? Look,

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how does this grab you: I'm not going to give out with a blank check; with my easygoing, credulous nature I'm too readily imposed upon. And I don't relish being summoned every time you have some trivial difficulty. Suppose we fix it this way: each time you want a favor, play that heavenish combination of sounds. Agreed?"

"I suppose so," said Donathon sullenly, feeling he was perhaps entitled to more personal service.

"I must caution you," said the devil, rising from his chair, yawning, twitching his tail, and limping back and forth, "that there are some wishes which simply won't work. No time machines, for instance, no teleportation."

"Why not?" demanded Donathon, to whom the idea of living his life all over again and correcting his mistakes with the aid of hindsight was suddenly very attractive.

"Too much trouble, my dear fellow. If you had any idea how much angelic energy goes into the construction of a time machine, not to speak of working out the mathematics and genealogical tables involved, you'd never dream of asking; I'm an artist, not a blessed computer. As for teleportation, do you think it would be fair for me to put the airlines out of business?"

"Surely teleporting one individual wouldn't have such a consequence?"

"If I did it for you, I'd have to do it for everybody," said the devil smugly. "No, no, dear fellow, teleportation is out. So is improving human nature or the destruction of all weapons. You will simply have to be reasonable."

"How about rejuvenation?"

The fiend smiled and rubbed his hands together. "A perfectly sensible and diabolical thought," he said. "Quite customary too."

"I mean rejuvenation with total recall of all that went before," stipulated Donathon cautiously.

"Perfectly acceptable, a very popular boon."

"Suppose some insoluble problem comes up, and I *have* to reach you?"

The Adversary yawned. "There are no insoluble problems, only incompetent solvers. But don't be alarmed; I'm leaving a little imp with you. In a pinch, he'll advise you."

"Where is he?" inquired Donathon, looking around.

"Oh, my dear fellow. Do you really expect to see an imp?"

"Well — Uh —"

"Exactly. So now that we've had our little chat I simply must vanish. Bye, now."

"No, wait a minute."

"Yes?" The tone was impatient.

"What do you get in return?

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You say you don't want my soul. What *do* you want?"

"You mean, what's in it for me? In a word, entertainment. Hell is a dreary place."

"So you visit the earth to torment us for your pleasure?"

"How ridiculous you humans are. It's an unfathomable mystery that my Distinguished Competitor should have continued to concern himself with you, eon after eon. He would have shown better sense to stop with porpoises. Or elephants. Torment, indeed! I leave that sort of thing to the good people, without whom I should never have fallen. Really, my meaning was simple. Elementary, even. For every action there must be a reaction, for every thesis, an antithesis. For every yang a yin, lingam a yoni."

"I don't understand."

"You are a self-defeating species. Disaster becomes you. Didn't my Competitor give you everything you could possibly need or want — except one thing? And that was the one thing you had to have, regardless of price?"

"It's said you expedited matters."

"It is also said that you can't cheat an honest man. Could I have tempted her to tempt him if they hadn't both been gluttonous? Would there be room for me in the cosmos at all, if I didn't serve a useful purpose?"

Donathon was beginning to find his visitor a bit of a bore. "If I don't bring disaster on myself, you won't change your mind and punish me?"

"Scout's honor," said the Prince of Darkness, and disappeared in an unpleasant peal of laughter.

Donathon picked up the fiddle. Since the original screek had been involuntary, he was by no means sure he could purposely reproduce it. He drew the bow across the strings. "I wish to be immortal," he whispered.

"No, no. You can't do it like that. You have to wish for something measurable."

Donothan looked around the empty room. "Who the devil are you?"

"Your guardian imp, of course. You were expecting perhaps a seraph?"

"But where are you?"

"Everywhere and nowhere. Where did you think?"

"You mean you're in my mind?"

"That, and elsewhere too. Come on now, be a docile victim. Wish again, only this time do it properly."

Once more Donathan drew his bow over the strings, shuddering at the ghastly sound. "I wish to live at least a hundred more years," he muttered. "That all right?"

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"It's not exactly the form protocol would prescribe, but I suppose it will do."

"I don't feel any different."

"No comment," telepathed the imp. "Get on with it; we haven't got forever."

"I can do a lot of wishing in a hundred years," said Donathon, emboldened by irritation. He plucked the A string, then played a bar of Merrily We Roll Along. It came out smoothly, without any screek.

"Youre improving," commented the imp discouragingly.

These supernatural creatures were simply impossible, thought Donathon, playing again. This time the teeth-on-edge sound was murderously satisfactory. "I wish to be twenty-four again," he said firmly.

"Oh, no," groaned the imp. "'Again' is redundant. You should simply have wished to be twenty-four."

"Does the form invalidate it?"

"I suppose not," conceded the imp. "But, after all, rules are rules."

Even before he went over to inspect himself in the mirror, Donathon knew the wish had been granted. His limbs became light; he could feel his belly harden and pull back in. His vision cleared; he could see a fly six feet away rub its legs together. "It's great to be alive," he shouted. "Great just to be alive!"

For instance, though he could feel the healthy blood pumping through his arteries, he made another wish on the fiddle. "I want to be as well as I am this minute as long as I live." There was no instant heightening of his euphoria, but he was sure his plea had been allowed. And since it had, there was no point at all in postponing the sequential demand. Making the violin respond with a very agony of sound, he cried, "I wish for young and lovely girls. Lots and lots and lots of them!"

"Oh, you fool," groaned the imp.

They came from nowhere, translated from the depths of his longing to physical being in the apartment much too small to contain them. There were tall, slender girls, short, exquisite girls, freckled, red-haired girls, torrid latins, icy swedes, norwegians, danes, dainty japanese, perfectly shaped chinese, annamese, tonkinese, cochinese, cambodians, and laotians. There were delicious malay girls, girls from africa in colors ranging from weathered ivory to smoky black, girls with tiny buds for breasts, with full, high bosoms, with flat bellies and round, with little backsides like cantaloupes, and with lush buttocks. Girls with lips chiseled out of

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carnelian, with lips like a bleeding wound, with puritanically tightened lips to be coaxed into wantonness. Girls with hair so fine it slipped through all pins or combs, impossible to confine, girls with wavy hair rippling down their backs, with tight little curls snug against their heads, with crisp, wiry springs teased out to great bushes. All were young, all were enchanting, all were his. They crowded close to him, touching his face, arms, chest. One, bolder than the others, pressed her soft mouth against his. Donathon was about to unbutton a very promising and tempting button when the phone rang.

Considering it coldly (but furiously), he reflected that he could sit for hours, days, even weeks without ever hearing that ghostly thrill. He had no friends, practically no acquaintances, and his relationship with the DMV was such that that bureaucracy never had occasion to call him. Yet at precisely the most interesting, absorbing, spine-tingling, heart-pounding, finger-licking moment of his life, the darned phone was buzzing its head off. It had to be a wrong number, or a pollster, or someone selling a rug-shampoo job. He let it ring, but his fingers stopped playing with the button.

The girl looked at him inquiringly. "I'm not going to answer," he said firmly. "It's bound to stop soon." But his mood had been rudely shattered, and he was inhibited from resuming his dalliance.

"Answer it," commanded his guardian imp. "The vibrations tell me that whoever is on the other end is ready to blow his stack and will keep on ringing till you blow yours."

"Oh, all right. Hellooo?"

"Vollander? Vollander is that you? Why don't you answer your phone?"

"This is Donathon Vollander speaking, and obviously I'm answering my phone."

"Oho, smart guy, huh? Look, Vollander, I'm not going to shallyshilly or beat around the block with you, you cheap pervert. I want them out of there pronto. Right now, you hear me? Or I'll call the fuzz on you."

"Who is this?"

"Who is this? Who is this? What do you think? Some sort of quiz program? This is Otto J. Klatterfuss. The Clatterfoot Realty Company. Your landlord, you filthy pervert!"

"Hold on, Mr. Clatterfoot. I don't know what you're talking about."

The telephone made strangling noises, like a man on the verge of apoplexy controlling his temper with enormous effort. "Lis-sen,

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Vollander. You don't know what I'm talking about? First off, the name is Klatterfuss. Otto Yay Klatterfuss. With a K. Clatterfoot — with a C — that's the name of my company. From numerology or something, a brainstorm out of my nephew. Now you get them out of there before I get the police after you."

"Get what out of where, Mr. Klatterfuss? And what's all this about a pervert?"

"Every tenant in the building is ringing me. Besides I saw it with my own eyes. Look, I'm a man of the world, I know about sowing wild oats. So you took a woman up into your apartment. This I could overlook. Maybe even two women. But dozens and dozens and hundreds of women. Some of them unquestionably not racially pure. This is what I mean by pervert. You get them out. Quick! Schnell!" There was a pause, then Klatterfuss began again in a still more excited voice. "Listen, Vollander: the fire department just called. You got women on all the fire escapes. They're blocking the hallways. Six deep around the front of the building. On the roof even. What's the matter with you, Vollander — can't you act like a normal human being? Five or six women I can understand. I know how it is — you get carried away. But a harem, an army! What in God's name can you do with them all? Listen, the fire chief personally is going to hand me a summons, and can I take it out of your hide? Oh, eventually, eventually. But first I got to evict you and then I got to sue you. And don't make a mistake — I will. I'll sue you for every nickel you got in the world. And I'll get your lousy two-bit job too, when I report you to the DMV as abnormal, a nymphomaniac, a absolute sex-fiend."

"This is your chance to ditch some of these birds," suggested the imp.

"You're out of your gourd," growled Donathon, reaching for his violin. He had to admit it was crowded in the apartment — he'd give that to Otto Klatterfuss. But it was not at all unpleasant to extricate the fiddle from a mass of warm, sweet-smelling, pulchritudinous young flesh. Reviving a little from the shock of the persistent telephone, he placed the violin beneath his chin and drew the bow back. His elbow brushed the soft breast of a girl standing behind him. "Oh, I beg your pardon, miss," he apologized.

"I'm Nancy," she told him in sweet, gentle tones, smiling through slightly parted lips and gazing at him with large brown eyes. "And I don't mind a bit. Truly I don't. You have such an electric touch."

"I couldn't help it."

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"It is crowded, isn't it? If only we could be alone together."

"That would be great," he agreed. But then he caught himself. He hadn't wished for lots and lots and lots of girls just to sneak off with only one of them, had he? "Ah, Nancy, sweet, you'll get used to all the other lovelies after a while. Remember the old song, Don't Fence Me In."

"I was only thinking of fencing some of the others out," Nancy responded wistfully.

He slid his bow over the G string, listening to the well-omened squeek. "I wish us all to be — to be —" Where? On top of a mountain? On a desert island? In an abandoned castle far from civilisation? He would have to think about it, consider a place which would be a safe refuge, a genuine haven. "Wait," he said, lifting his bow from the instrument.

He distinctly heard sirens in the street. The police — or the fire department, or some organisation hell-bent on preserving monogamy — were closing in. The fiddle shrieked again. "I wish all the firemen, policemen, and morals freaks, together with Otto Klatterfuss to be summoned urgently to the other side of the Donner Pass." The sound of the sirens ceased. He played a few notes. "I wish this apartment house, formerly the property of the Clatterfoot Realty Company, entered and recorded in my name at the county clerk's office."

Nancy clapped her lovely hands together. "Oh, you wonderful, clever man. I don't know what it was you did, but I know it was clever and wonderful."

Donathon kissed her. The sensation was delightful. He reached beyond her to another girl and kissed *her*. Vollander's Law: Six lips are better than four. "My name is Alice," she murmured, closing her violet eyes so that her incredibly long lashes rested on her creamy cheeks. "You are very good to me."

Now that his head was cooler (except for the proximity of Nancy and Alice and god knew how many others he had yet to sample, he realized that wishing them all to be elsewhere would never have worked. It would have invoked teleportation wouldn't it? And teleportation was barred. Absolutely and finally barred. Along with time machines. He kissed another girl, one with copper curls. "I'm Susan," she said, as he gently began taking certain liberties with her.

"Of course, Susan. I'd know you anywhere. You're one in a million."

"Surely there aren't quite that many of us," she protested. "This building would collapse under the weight."

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"You must be right," he said, absently nibbling her little pink ear. "But say a thousand, even. How am I to get a thousand women from here to there without teleporting them?"

"Where's there?" asked Susan, drawing an imaginary mustache on his lip with her finger.

"Ah, if I only knew," sighed Donathon, reaching between Alice and Susan to fondle Nancy again. "Knowing your goal is half the battle. Or some of it, anyway."

"Look," projected the imp. "There's a way out of this. Maybe it's treasonable of me to help you, but I can't bear to see a dumb creature suffer. All you have to do is wish these females back where they came from, then drive to whatever suitable spot you'll have picked, and wish for unlimited girls again."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," exclaimed Donathon, shocked. "I might not get the same ones."

"What difference would that make?"

"A great deal," answered Donathon, putting on the expression he used in the Department of Motor Vehicles when some applicant tried a shortcut. "Whatever their origin, these girls — these lovely, lovely, *lovely* girls are now human beings, individual, differentiated human beings with thoughts, feelings, and memories of their own, not just blobs of protoplasm called out of oblivion like so many nuts and bolts."

"With souls, no doubt," sneered the imp.

"Why not?"

"Hairsplitter!" cried the imp silently, sneering harder. "Sophist! What are you going to do, then?"

"I'm Myra," announced a ravishing creature with nile-green eyes and long chestnut tresses, "and I think you're terribly handsome."

He kissed Myra and felt it worth the effort to kiss her again. "I don't know," he confessed to the imp, "but I'm not going to give up one of these sweethearts, no, not one."

"You are a wonderful man," cried a thousand feminine voices in chorus, "a hero."

"A sentimentalist," corrected the imp, inaudibly.

"I'll tell you," said Donathon, thinking aloud. "The trick of recording my ownership of the building will buy only a short breathing spell. Then they'll be down on us for all sorts of violations, no matter who owns the building. So," he continued, positioning his violin and picking up the bow, "I'm going to wish —"

"Wait just a minute, darling," called one of the girls crowding the doorway. "I'm *starv*ing. How about a snack for little old Diana?"

"Me too!" "Me too!" cried out

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sopranos, mezzo-sopranos, contraltos, altos. "When do we eat?"

"Ladies, ladies," pleaded Donathon, "be patient, I beg you. First things first. As soon as I've arranged for a suitable place for us — for all of us — I'll also arrange for a sumptuous banquet to be served there —"

"To hell with that," called out a slender girl in blue jeans. "That's pie in the sky. We want to eat now. None of your male chauvinist tricks."

"Why don't you wish they were all well-fed and satisfied?" whispered the imp. "That'll get them off your neck."

"That would hardly be ethical," replied Donathon disdainfully. "Like feeding them chocolate-flavored sawdust."

"Prig!" said the imp.

Donathon played the opening bars of Merrily We Roll Along. "I wish everyone in this building or reasonably close to it to have a nice, fresh box lunch. And a glass of milk," he added as an afterthought. Immediately oblong cartons descended like snow all over the apartment house and the street outside, with glasses of milk beside them. The girls squealed with interest, amazement, delight, or all three. Boxes were opened and glasses of milk knocked over. Then the complaints began. Many of the girls, the orientals particularly, didn't drink milk — wouldn't touch the stuff under any circumstances. As for the sandwiches inside the lunchboxes, many girls refused white bread on the ground that it was poison and would make their beautiful teeth drop out. Others were vegetarians. Still others objected that the fruit in each box might have been sprayed with insecticides. Donathon held his hands to his temples. "Problems, my god what problems. You'd think a simple little thing like a box lunch —"

"You were too high and mighty to listen to me," thought his guardian imp tartly.

"Ladies, ladies. Dear, adorable, fascinating girls," Donathon called out. "Listen to me, I beg you."

"I'm Aster," announced one girl loudly. "You have something to say to me, you whisper it in my ear. I will not, repeat not, be wooed over a public address system."

"Privacy for all," cried a voluptuous blonde.

"Privacy for each," a dainty brunette corrected her.

"Please listen: I have a plan —"

Jeers and boos burst from delicate, petallike lips.

Donathon plowed on. "Stage one calls for all of you to be moved to a retreat where there will be ample room, as well as all the personal conveniences I'm sure you feel the lack of at the moment. As

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soon as you are all safely away from here —"

"Oh, no, you don't." "You're not going to ship us off to some wilderness and abandon us there." "Coward — planning to split on us!"

"Girls, girls. I assure you I'll join you the moment I attend to a few necessary chores — just some loose ends that have to be tied up. Please, my dears, please."

Still grumbling, they quieted down enough for Donathon to play the fiddle and wish for a thousand acres of cattle range, well-watered, timbered with live oak, pine, and sycamore, with access to the ocean, and a two-hundred-room functional dwelling, complete with dormitories for the girls and (somewhat embarrassed) a master bedroom for himself and whatever transient companions he chose to summon.

"You forgot the swimming pool," suggested the imp.

Donathon modified his plan to include a large pool, capable of being warmed, with a retractable canvas sunshade over it for hot days, located in a sunny spot. Also a subsistence farm with a dairy herd, a flock of chickens, and an acre kitchen garden. "Now," he said, fiddling away, and wary of the impinging dangers of crossing the line forbidding teleportation, "I want a large-scale map showing the exact location of my property. A map — or another one if necessary — to show its geographical and topographical relation to this city."

The maps, neatly rolled into large cylinders, unrolled themselves jerkily on the table, spilling over onto the floor. "I wish," he said dreamily, "a railroad — standard guage, none of your dinkies — correctly banked, with easy curves and gentle grade, in existence between here and there. Let the tracks be of good steel, solidly ballasted, with turnouts at intervals, and rollingstock consisting of one *steam* locomotive and four pullman cars. And a freight car. Now. Immediately." He looked out the window. "I don't see it," he exclaimed in rising panic.

"Probably connects with a spur from the station," suggested the imp.

"How am I going to find out? I can't call the depot, it's been closed for years."

"Hire a helicopter," advised the imp. "Have him fly over the tracks till he finds the spur with the train on it."

"How do I do that? I don't believe they have helicopter rental agencies in the yellow pages. I'd have to get one from San Francisco or Los Angeles. And with the police and firemen breathing down my neck I have to remind you that time

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is of the essence."

"Take your car and drive there, then."

Donathon hesitated. "I don't like to leave the ladies unprotected."

"Now," silently muttered the imp, "I've heard everything. All right — call a taxi."

This seemed sensible advice. He found the number in the phonebook, dialed, and gave his address. Having wishes granted was certainly a wearing business. A man could quickly become exhausted just implementing his desires.

The phone rang. Police? Fire? Building inspector? Society for the Protection of Virtue? Surely it was too soon for the taxi company to explain their driver couldn't find his address. "Hello?"

A hesitant voice asked timidly, "Is — is this Mr. Vollander? Mr. Donathon Vollander?"

"That's right. If you're going to tell me I've just won the right to buy something for twice what it costs in the stores, you're wasting our time."

"Oh, my but you sound fierce. And mother always said you were such a gentle person."

"Anybody can be gentle till he has to put up with the devil, an imp, and a thousand beautiful women. Wait a minute — 'mother'? Who is 'mother'?"

"'Was,'" replied the timid voice, growing slightly stronger. "This is Heather Beedleman. My mother was Angela Fairway. I don't suppose you remember her —"

"Remember her!" shouted Donathon. "Of course I remember her. How could I forget her? She jilted me."

"Oh? I hadn't realized there had been an engagement or even an understanding, Mr. Vollander. Mother told me you never got together because you were too shy. And she always regretted not having spoken up for herself."

"Sweet Angela," murmured Donathon, nostalgic tears welling under his eyelids. "And you're her little girl. What's your name again — Gorse? Bracken?"

"Heather."

"Heather. Of course. How old are you?"

"I'm twenty, Mr. Vollander. And I look just like mother in her old pictures. Except that I don't wear creepy clothes, naturally."

"Twenty," repeated Donathon, his mouth beginning to water. "Little Heather. Look —have you got a car?"

"I — Oh, I'm afraid not —"

"Well, you get in a taxi and get over here right now. I'll take care of the fare. Hear me?"

"You sound so strong and masterful. But didn't you say you had a thousand women there?"

"Always room for one more,"

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said Donathon masterfully. "Besides, a thousand and one — Scheherazade. Catch?"

"I'm not sure I dig, but that's probably just the nasty old generation gap. I'm on my way — just left, in fact."

"Little Heather," mused Donathon into a dead phone. "Forgot to ask her if she was beautiful. Not that it makes any difference. With a thousand swans one duck has to stand out."

There was a commotion downstairs. "The beast! The beast — he pushed me." "That's nothing, sister; he put his hand on my hip. If you know what I mean. "The nasty man adjusted my pantyhose for me without my asking him."

"Ladies, please, ladies. This is all a dreadful misunderstanding." A disheveled cabdriver, his originally stiff uniform cap beaten into the shapelessness of a swaggering aviator's, his gray twill jacket ripped and torn, clawed his way into the apartment between the screaming girls.

"Darlings!" shouted Donathon, becoming more masterful by the moment. "Let him alone, will you? I need him for all our sakes."

"Oh, no, you don't," protested the hackie. "None of the funny stuff. When I foist saw all these gorgeous chicks here clustered around like honeybees, I forgot for a second I was pushing a yellow in the boondocks and imagined myself back in the big time. I even thought of making a deal with some of these cuz, but then I said to myself, 'George,' — that's me, George Agnopolis — 'George, you're a square citizen now, forget it.' But then when I finally get up here and smell monkey business goan on well, it makes you think, doan it?"

Donathon assured Mr. Agnopolis that he was under a misapprehension and explained that all he wanted was for the cabbie to drive out to the railroad tracks and locate the newly laid line which probably had a train made up and ready on it.

"You sure it's all legit?"

"Guarantee it. Just find the line and come back here with your flag still down."

Still looking somewhat skeptical, George started on his errand. Donathon realized he would be needing money soon; he foresaw that expenses would start mounting. Fiddling, he murmured, "I wish I had a million dollars," adding whimsically, "in nondepreciating money."

The floor trembled beneath his feet, the entire apartment house shook nervously. Earthquake? H-bomb? (He'd been warned not to improve human nature, but he hadn't, had he?) They were miles from the nearest fault — he was

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pretty sure — and all the commentators agreed the danger of war was minimal. (Ominous, that.)

The girls squealed, shrieked, cried out, whimpered. "Ladies!" Donathon called. "Darlings, cool it, please." He looked around the apartment. Every bit of level space — floor, table, chairs, which was not occupied by charming females was a repository for stacks of gold pieces, their milled edges glinting and twinkling as they caught the light. Of course, thought Donathon bitterly, I had to go and add that provision about nondepreciating dollars — gold ones are the only kind that fit. It was the sudden impact of their colossal weight which made the building shake and which will grind it down into the ground.

He grabbed his fiddle and wished the building adequately braced with props and buttresses, beams and girders. In his agitation, which hadn't subsided when the apartment house ceased trembling, he clung to the nearest girl for comfort. "I'm Linda," she said. "Rest your head here and I will soothe you."

"Ah, Linda," he whispered, complying and shutting his eyes, "it really doesn't pay to make a pact with the devil. Too many fast-developing angles."

"Hush," she admonished, touching his eyelids gently. "Don't think negatively. Just think of how much Linda adores you."

"Do you really?"

"Really is one of those nasty old words. When you touch me —" here she put his hand on her firm, responsive body "— that's reality. Everything else is illusion."

"Ah, Linda," he breathed, "I love you. And Nancy, Susan, Aster, Alice, Myra, and Diana too," he added.

"And all the others?"

"And all the others," he agreed.

There was another commotion downstairs at the entrance. Donathon opened his eyes. "What's going on?"

"Foolish man, what does it matter? Forget everything but the joys of Linda —"

"And Nancy, Susan, Alice, and Diana."

"You forgot Aster and Myra," she reminded him. "Fickle man."

"And all the others. Forgive me, my sweets."

The hubbub grew louder. Could this be the taximan back with news of the railroad to his haven? Surely not — the girls would be like watchdogs; once a stranger had got past them and been accepted by the master, they wouldn't molest him again.

"Let me through — oh, please let me through." There was more scuffling, more pleading, and finally Donathon caught a glimpse

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of a vision. "Oh, Mr. Vollander, please tell them to let me through. I told them you were expecting me, but they only laughed. Oh —"

"You're Heather," he said dazedly. All the others were beautiful, but Heather was superb, the acme of glorious femininity, everyman's dream woman made exquisite flesh. Just to look at her was to experience a stab, a mortal wound, an agonized longing. "You're Heather," he repeated.

"I'm Heather. But you — you can't be Donathon Vollander. You must be his son."

"Let's not get tangled up in trivial details," he begged. "I'm Donathon Vollander. I'm yours and you are mine."

"All mine?" she asked, devastating him with a single glance of her lovely eyes.

"Yours and these other young ladies'," he answered.

Evidently their little colloquy so engaged the attention of those crowding the doorway to the apartment that they let two men through unhindered. These men wore blue suits, brilliantly shined shoes, appeared to be about thirty and accustomed to daily exercise. "Mr. Jonathon Hollander?" inquired one, holding out a little leather cardcase with a small metal badge. "Treasury agents."

"I'm Donathon Vollander," said Donathon. It was not the first time this particular mistake had been made.

"Tell us where we can reach Mr. Hollander?"

"I don't know any Hollander. My name is Vollander."

"Heard you the first time," said the agent cheerily. "I advise you to cooperate with us and give us the information as to how we can reach this Hollander."

Donathon gave up. After all, he was civil service himself, and he knew government employees were seldom recruited from the top percentile of the intelligent. "Can you tell me what you want with him?"

"We have information," began the agent, ignoring the piles of stacked gold pieces, "that he has violated the Gold Reserve Act of 1933, to wit, having in his possession (not being a bona fide collector) gold coins of the United States."

"If I see him, I'll tell him," said Donathon.

"My card. Let him contact us immediately. If he can clear himself, good. Otherwise, he may be faced with grave penalties. Thank you, sir." The two men vanished quite as though teleportation had not been interdicted at all.

Donathon waved a dismissive hand at the empty spot where they had stood and was about to turn his attention to Heather again when

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George Agnopolis arrived with news. "You know, at foist I thought it was a rib, a boffo some joker dreamt up; a hackie is always the patsy; whoever hoid of building a railroad? But I wheeled the old crate out to the old station and followed alongside the tracks for a ways, and sure enough, what do I see? A train with four cars. Don't look like nothing they run anymore. So it's about a mile out, and I got four bucks on the clock."

Donathon restrained an impulse to say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Instead he handed the taximan one of the double eagles.

"What's this?"

"A twenty-dollar gold piece."

"Oh yeah? Well, if it's just the same to you, I rather have real money."

"Give him a check," the imp recommended.

"No," protested Donathon. "Listen, Mr. Agnopolis, I'm offering you lawful money and a tip of sixteen dollars. No law except the law of supply and demand can demonetize gold and arbitrarily make it unlawful money. Besides, gold has gone up, way up, as you undoubtedly know. One of these is no longer worth twenty dollars but around a hundred. If you have any doubts, call any bank or coin shop. Use my phone. Or take the gold piece to any hobby shop and cash it in. Only be sure to come back. I have another job for you."

"That reminds me," said Heather, "the cab I came in is still waiting downstairs. Is it all right if I borrow—one of these to pay the man?"

"Borrow!" exclaimed Donathon. "Help yourself. All I have is yours."

"OOOooo," squealed Aster, Diana, and assorted others. "May we have some too? They're so pretty." Without waiting for permission, they began helping themselves. But the gold was so heavy they hesitated to put much of it in their skimpy pockets for fear of getting them out of shape (few of the girls carried purses); so they made no appreciable inroads on the stacks of coins.

But Donathon worried lest the treasury agents return with a warrant for his arrest. Even if he had the time and the means to move himself and the women to the waiting train, he was loath to leave the gold behind. True, it could be replaced with the help of his violin, but he was beginning to think that perhaps his pact with the devil might not remain effective indefinitely. And a million dollars was a million dollars — closer to five million, in fact.

He phoned the armored-car service, the only one in town. Yes, sure, no problem, they transported

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coin, bullion, in any amount, any distance. What was the weight of the bullion he wanted delivered?

"A million dollars in twenty-dollar gold pieces," answered Donathon, determined not to be diffident.

The armored-car service hung up.

He called a moving and storage company. Yeah, sure they moved anything. Yeah, that's right. What did he have? A long pause. "You cleared with the FBI?"

If Donathon had been satisfied of his moral right to possess the gold pieces he would have boiled and blustered — to what effect he couldn't say. But he was uneasy over the legal aspect, and, besides, time was running out. He was puzzling over what to do, absently ruffling Susan's silky hair, when the phone rang. "You Vollmer?"

"I'm Donathon Vollander."

"Yeah, Yeah. We hear you been trying to make a deal with some scabs to haul a couple of tons of gold."

"Who's 'we'?"

"I'm talking for the Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffers, Warehousemen, and Helpers."

"I didn't know you people dealt directly with the shippers."

"Only if the shippers try to pull a fast one. Now look here, Vollinger —"

"Vollander."

"Okay, okay, whatever you call yourself. Now you realize this shipment of yours has got to be handled by organized men, that is, by the IBTCWH."

"That's not my business. Aren't the moving men I called union members?"

"That's not the point. This here operation may be illegal all around. We got to protect our membership. Otherwise what are we doing here?"

"Search me," said Donathon, suppressing the retort: Beating up farm workers.

"So this is a special case. We can't let our men go out on a job that might mean the risk of breaking the law."

"So what do you want me to do?"

"Make a contribution to our welfare fund that will take care of any legal trouble we may run into."

"How much of a contribution?"

"Say twenty thousand bucks."

"And if there's no legal trouble, do I get the twenty thousand back?"

"You kidding, Mr. Von Ander?"

"Will you accept the twenty thousand in gold?"

"Why not?"

"And guarantee safe delivery?"

"You think we might want a few souvenirs?"

"It crossed my mind."

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"Rest easy, Mr. Voutner, rest easy. Have we got a deal?"

"You've got a deal. If you can have your men here in twenty minutes or less."

"Will do," agreed the obliging teamster.

Donathon had recourse to his fiddle again to wish another two thousand dollars in his checking account. As he finished, George Agnopolis reappeared, grinning broadly. "I guess you found the gold piece was okay?"

"Never doubted it," returned the cabble. "Where to now?"

Donathon arranged to have all the girls except Heather, Nancy, Susan, and Aster taken by relays of taxis to the waiting train. There was angry protest at this, since it was clear he meant to take them with him in his own car. He soothed their ruffled feelings by pointing out that they would all be together again on the railroad trip, and after that in the castle where they could expect to spend cosy years with him in all kinds of gaiety and love-making.

While the fleet of taxis was being organized, crowded with delicious, dewy, chattering, laughing passengers, the ponderous flatrack trucks arrived. The drivers, made shy by the presence of the women, silently — but not without fumbling — packed the coins in heavy wooden boxes; receipts were given, and the loaded trucks driven off. Donathon and the four girls crowded cosily into his car (his only luggage was the violin), and he drove to the railroad depot and out on a rutted country road to where a 4-6-4 locomotive was breathing heavily. Attached to the engine were four Pullman cars, named Venus, Aphrodite, Astarte, and Cytherea, all freshly washed and shining and smelling strongly of heavy oil.

Climbing aboard, Donathon was overwhelmed again by the delicious smell and burbling of the girls. Yet he was once more shocked at his own lack of moderation. Why hadn't he had the self-control to wish for five, or even ten charmers? The greedy choke to death, he reflected.

He'd made no arrangements for a crew to operate the train. Did this mean it would stand here indefinitely? As though to answer his question he heard the old, no longer familiar, "Bawwwwwwd!" and felt the Pullman tremble. Did this indicate the train was being run by a crew of robots? To have collected an engineer, fireman, and conductor would have meant teleportation, wouldn't it? But perhaps not; who knew the extent of diabolical powers?

While the train moved majestically across the landscape, with glimpses of the ocean out of the

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right-hand windows and of rugged hills on the left, Donathon and his ladies amused themselves with kissing games, guessing games, daddy and mommy games, gunny hug, electric blanket, eskimo night, seesaw, bear rug, play ball, and others too curious to mention. When they were tired out, Donathon wished for a Pullman with a swimming pool hooked on to the rear, and he took turns with groups of the girls till all had splashed and swum away their weariness, shrieking with laughter because Donathon was too slippery to catch while wet. Drying themselves, they lounged around, sipping champagne or iced fruit juices, munching on snacks prepared to their individual tastes.

It was afternoon, but far short of evening, when they reached their destination. If Donathon had had any uneasiness about the adequacy of the castle he had wished for, he was able to dismiss it now. Large, yet unpretentious, the glass, copper and concrete structure hugged the ground, nowhere rising more than two stories. The indigenous flora remained undisturbed, golden poppies and purple lupine, with deep-blue mountain lilac in the background. Ceiling-high windows were interrupted by many French doors, and there were indications the castle was designed to be lived around the outside as well as in.

The interior was simple. Even Donathon's own suite had no gaudy circular bed, mirrored ceiling, or suggestive prints on the walls, but was furnished in civilized style, with soft, thick tatami on the floors, pillowbooks scattered strategically, and a single erotic scroll painting or woodcut in each room. Besides the communal pool where all the women splashed and sported with Donathon, there was a smaller bath in his suite for himself and whomever he might invite.

The gold hoard, which he never bothered trying to count, arrived and was stored away in a capacious basement. There was some talk among the women of fashioning the coins into ornaments, but it was never implemented. Playing his fiddle, he wished all traces of the railroad away.

So, isolated and practically invisible — for what traveler on the coast highway to the west, or high above in a plane, would believe his eyes when the setting sun lit up the windows of the castle in dazzling orange or red in the middle of an otherwise empty cattle range? — Donathon Vollander and his numerous ladies (he never did get around to taking a census, but he could always tell them apart by using any one of his senses) lived out the years in reasonable content. The delirious transports of multigination sobered into pleasant

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habit; except for tidying up the castle and having the beds made, the wish fiddle was used less and less as the exotic demands were gratified and more mundane needs took their place. No more orgies (except on Midsummer Night) but longer and quieter sleep.

No children were born except to Heather, though all the girls co-operated enthusiastically. Donathan assumed this must be because they were daughters of Lilith, created through wish and artistry, rather than born of the clumsy natural process like Heather, and so without the children of Eve's capacity to reproduce physically.

It was idyllic; yet sometimes he wondered if it were not he, rather than the devil, who had been outsmarted. Was it that rapture could become routine? And if it did, was it no longer rapture?

From time to time he had moods of wistfulness, even dissatisfaction. He regretted the increasing withdrawal of his guardian imp, who had ceased initiating telepathic conversations, and it became harder to get his attention at all. One of the times he succeeded, he burst out, "I get bored."

"Naturally," agreed the imp.

"They're so *young*," complained Donathon.

"They'll grow older," the imp consoled him.

"I won't be able not to wish them young again."

"Throw away the violin. Break it."

"Oh, no," protested Donathon. "Suppose there were a crisis? A child ill, or the land sliding into the ocean, or war —"

"The fiddle would be useless then. You were warned you couldn't improve human nature."

"Mitigate calamity," said Donathon tersely.

"As for the women, I always said you wished for too many."

"I did, but not for obvious reasons. The drawback to great diversity —"

"Don't hum and haw. Express yourself."

"— is that you can't imagine fresh variety to wish for. And without fantasies, lechery withers. Anyway, it's too late now."

"You can still wish some away. Say three-quarters."

"We've had this conversation before. I won't wish one who has been dear to me into limbo." He looked around him. "This place is a mess. A thousand supremely healthy women, and the floors haven't been swept or the beds made." His eye fell on Clare, the very darkest member of the household, whose natural hairdo was a crinkling bush of awesome proportions. She had been one of his bedmates last night. Or had it been the night before? "Clare, what

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gives around here?"

"Tell you, honky," murmured Clare, from whose soft lips he had heard the most lascivious entreaties of passion only last night (or the one before), "why don't you get up off you butt and sweep up yousef if you so anxious? Slavery days over sometime back."

"Right on," said the girl in jeans who was even more familiar without them, but whose name he couldn't remember. "What makes you think you can make playthings of women, exploit them, just because you're a biological freak with one less chromosome and erectile tissue hanging out instead of in?"

"Me?" cried Donathon. "Me, an exploiter of women?" He drew back as from an abyss of horror.

"Get your fiddle and wish the place cleaned up," advised the imp.

Something had gone wrong. Not disastrously wrong, just slightly askew, as when Mr. Klatterfoos called up and raised hell about the girls, so that Donathon had had to have him summoned beyond the Donner Pass because he couldn't straightforwardly teleport him to Winnemucca or Ely. Now he had the strange feeling that the imp's message, instead of being silently conveyed, had been broadcast aloud so both girls heard it.

"Oh, no, you don't," said the girl in jeans, whose name, he suddenly recalled, was Harriet, and who scorned the "missionary position" as degrading to women. She always insisted on being on top and spoke contemptuously of those who docilely accepted the more usual placement. "It's about time we had a few more equal rights around here. *I'll* play the fiddle. Clare, darling, get it for me, will you?"

Clare left the room, returned with the violin, handed it to Harriet, whose triumphant glance at Donathon made him realize how much he had missed having a woman bully him. "Hadn't you better let me show you how?" he suggested meekly as she stood with the instrument in her hand, obviously at a loss.

To his surprise, she handed it over. He drew the bow across the strings, aware of a surge of power such as he had never felt before. He *had* triumphed over the devil after all, had got his wishes, and gotten off scot-free. What came out of the sound holes was no evocative screech but the distilled celestial essence of all Donathon felt for the dear, dear, *dear* girls whose loveliness he had penetrated and whose flesh had taken his in. With perfect mastery of the fiddle, he praised in glorious tones the wonders of creation, beauty, and that incredibly ingenious arrangement employing interlocking parts

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to Elysian ends. Finally, with difficulty, he recalled he was supposed to be playing for a utilitarian purpose. "I wish the beds made, the rooms swept and dusted, the rooms cleaned up."

Nothing happened.

"I said —"

"You idiot," cried the imp — and this time there was no doubt he was speaking out loud, "how do you expect to command diabolical forces by playing heavenly music? Good-bye, dolt, I expect to be called home any second now."

Harriet snatched the fiddle and bow out of Donathon's flaccid fingers. Tucking it under her chin in a way which would have made Joachim turn over in his grave, she forced the violin to give out with such dreadful cacophony that Donathon felt it would be years before his backbone stopped twanging.

"You called, I think?" the devil murmured to Harriet, who didn't seem in the least startled.

"I certainly did, and I want some action around here. Right now."

"I'm here to serve you."

"That verb has a sexist connotation."

"A thousand pardons. What is your wish?"

"Equality. Absolute, unequivocal equality."

The devil was silent.

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"Well?" urged Harriet impatiently.

"Dear lady, as far as infernity is concerned, equality has usually prevailed. It is true that from time to time women have been regarded as temptresses, witches, incubi, and other agents of wickedness. Whereas everyone knows the dear creatures have always been man's better half, constantly guiding his footsteps away from the flowery fields of evil onto the rocky uplands of virtue."

"That's a slander," cried Harriet, "we're every bit as bad as men are. I defy you to prove otherwise."

"I always know when I'm

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defeated," sighed the devil. "I grant unhesitatingly that equality means feminine domination."

"I want it understood that no wishes will be granted around here except those expressed by our sisterhood."

"That's an easy one," said Beelzebub. "You notice Donathon's latest summons was futile. The poor fellow has wallowed in bliss so long he can no longer play a sour note. But now that your sorority is in the dominant place equality entitles you to, perhaps you'd like to dispense with Donathon altogether? Send him back to the Department of Motor Vehicles?"

"Get rid of Donathon?" exclaimed Myra, who had come upon them unnoticed. "That's the weirdest thing I've heard."

"He may not be the smartest man in the world," said Clare thoughtfully, "but he's sweet. And who needs intelligence in a man, anyway?"

"Besides, we're used to him," explained Alice.

"And he's the only husband we have," added Diana.

"I'm only trying to be accommodating," murmured the devil. "I thought perhaps you'd prefer a regiment of husky young men. Normally young, I mean."

"Don't be gross," cried Mitsuko. "'Normally young'! How revolting can you get?"

"Then what *do* you wish?" asked the devil exhaustedly.

"I'll tell you," said Heather. "We want Donathon to admit he exists for our convenience, not the other way around, or to stop strutting with that old fiddle as though it were his through some merit and give it up to us entirely —"

"That's right, that's right," cried a number of lovely voices together. "Only women will fiddle around here in future!"

Carried away by this contagious and mounting enthusiasm, two ravishing beauties seized the violin in order to demonstrate their prerogative. Clearly surprised to find themselves struggling for its possession, both released their hold apologetically and simultaneously.

The violin fell to the floor, landing on edge in such a way that the back cracked and shattered irreparably. "Well," murmured the disembodied voice of the imp, growing fainter. "That certainly tears it. Now you'll have to live in your unalterable daydream forever."

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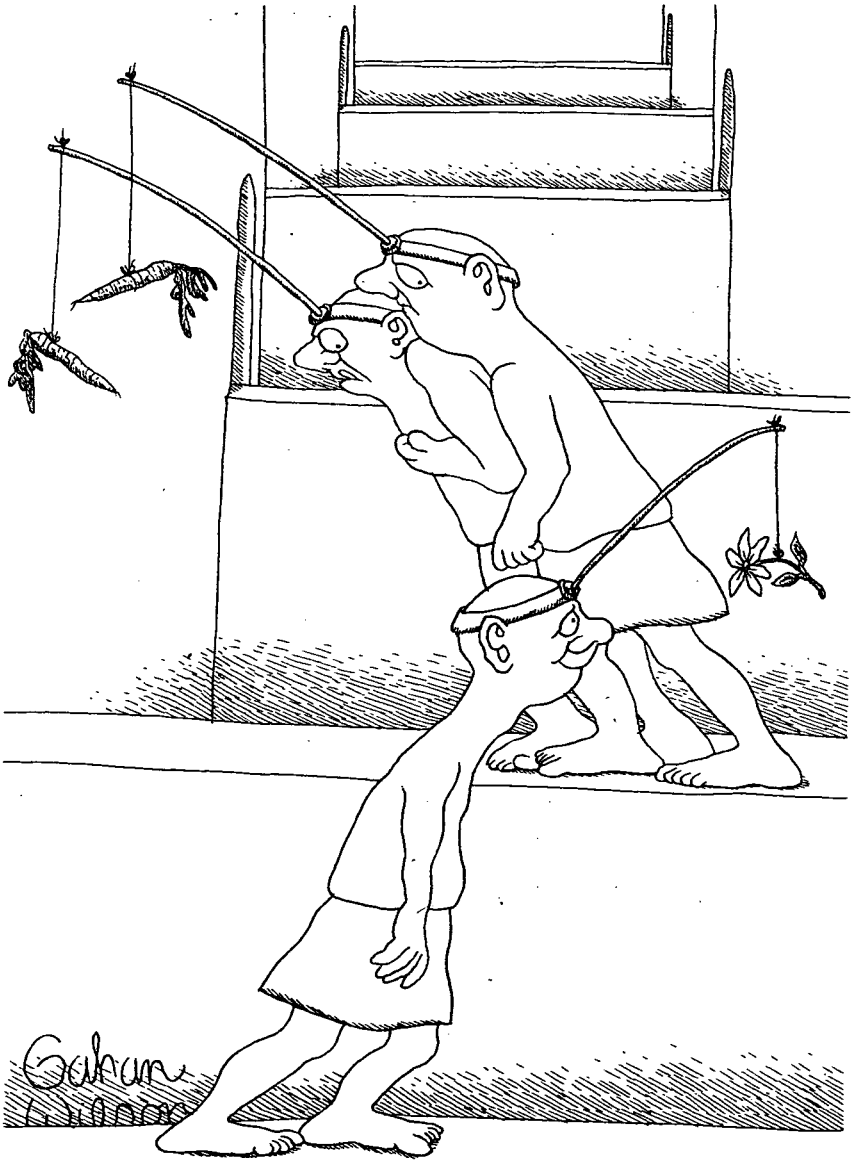

"Must be some kind of queer!"

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Scott Corbett's first story for F&SF concerns a TV game show with lavish prizes and terrifying consequences. Mr. Corbett is the author of many popular books for children.

Game Show

by SCOTT CORBETT

In the neighborhood bar on that Friday night after another gray week at the bank, something unusual was happening to George Putney. He had met a man who seemed interested in hearing him talk about himself.

George stopped by the place nearly every Friday night. It was an ordinary bar, neither smart nor seedy, with customers to match. He often wondered why he came. Oh, people sometimes passed the time of day with him there — the regulars, the bartenders — but they never talked for long, nor said anything worthwhile. There were always a good many women around, some with escorts and some on their own, but George never risked an approach. He knew women found him unattractive and told himself, thinking the actual stilted words, that it was because he had none of the glamour of wealth and position to offer. Ample evidence that a good many presentable females had settled for a lot less was one of the many facts of life he preferred not to face.

Besides, these everyday women were not really good enough, not when there was Miss Getzel at the bank for whom he secretly burned in St. Paul's flame without daring to propose the better course of marriage. She would laugh in his face — unless, of course, he were suddenly to become president of the bank.

As a rule, he had a couple of drinks, watched people in the long mirror behind the bar, tried to think of himself as a wearily amused observer of life, and then, when he couldn't stand it any longer, left the place and went back to his one-bedroom apartment in the Taylor Arms, where the doorbell never buzzed and the telephone never rang.

But now, here was this windfall.

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George was flattered, too, because the stranger was not one of those commonplace ignoramuses who lined the rest of the bar. He was tall, well-groomed, and obviously cultured, with the voice of an educated man and the bearing of someone who was used to being successful at whatever he undertook.

After a few moments of cordial small talk as they stood side by side — somehow, it seemed to George, they hit it off right away — the man introduced himself.

"My name is Gresham," he said, and while shaking hands George replied, "Mine is Putney." He liked the idea of last names, it had class, the sort of thing you had to go to English novels to find these day. Of all the novels he read, and George read a good many, he much preferred the English.

By the time Gresham had ordered another round and they had moved to a table against the wall, George was holding nothing back. He did his best to talk about himself with some semblance of cynical grace and detachment, but of course the bitterness kept seeping through.

"My line of work? Well, I waste most of my time in a branch bank. I'm the assistant manager," he replied to Gresham's latest question. "I'll never make it to a vice-presidency because I'm not the kind who knows how to curry favor in the right places. I'm not popular."

"Well, but ability . . ."

"Oh, I have ability. I just don't seem to get anywhere," said George with bleak scorn. "I plug along, and nothing happens."

Beneath the glossy dark hair parted in the middle, Gresham's face was startlingly white, providing a theatrical setting for the brilliance of his deep-set eyes. George had the feeling, subliminally uneasy, that very little could be concealed from the dark penetration of those eyes. Gresham took a fastidious sip of his drink and set it down thoughtfully without taking his hand away.

"I know what you mean," he murmured, still looking down at his glass as he turned it slowly around on the table, making rings. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."

"Thoreau," said George promptly. The one thing he was proud of was his knowledge of literature. Gresham glanced up at him with quick interest.

"Don't tell me that in these surroundings I have come across a man who has read a book!" he said.

"I read all the time." said George. "It's my one ... my one..."

"Refuge?"

George was quick to recognize the *mot juste.*

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"Exactly. My refuge. My refuge from not having the success and money and women a branch bank somehow fails to provide among its fringe benefits," said George, trying hard for a playful tone himself but missing because of the shrill note of self-pity that slipped through to spoil his performance. But before he could do more than flush and wish he had controlled his voice, Gresham was speaking again.

"And so you read about people who do and dare, and wish you could simply stake it all on one throw, winner take all, and get it over with," he suggested with an insight that made George feel naked and defenseless. Like all men who cannot see their way to their dreams, who lack the talent and ability to set a course and pursue it ruthlessly and patiently until they get what they think they want, he had often daydreamed of the one big chance that would settle everything once and for all. He stared at Gresham, impressed, and then was horribly disappointed by the banality of his next remark.

"With your reading background and fund of general knowledge you ought to get on one of those TV game shows and win yourself some prizes," said Gresham.

George had not stopped to think where their conversation might be leading, but to have it lead to a dead end as trivial as this was traumatic. His own voice went hoarse with contempt.

"Good God! *Those shows?*"

"Do you watch them?" Gresham asked in an insinuating tone, as though he knew the answer, and George reddened. He struggled with himself, then made the honest admission.

"Yes, I do! I watch them often. I watch them because I always know the answers, and I marvel at the illiterate bastards who get on the shows and don't know the first thing about anything!"

The slightest curl of amusement appeared below Gresham's neatly clipped mustache.

"I seem to have touched a nerve. And I quite agree with you — most of those shows are vulgar and ridiculous, and the prizes, even though sometimes substantial, would hardly set a man up for life. However, I was thinking of a new show that has just started, a serious show on a new level that makes the rest of them look like ... just what they are," he said, leaning forward and speaking with an enthusiasm that verged on excitement. "It comes on at midnight on Channel Eleven."

Still feeling let down and sidetracked, George gave this news short shrift.

"Channel Eleven? I can't get Channel Eleven."

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Gresham contradicted him politely.

"Are you sure? I've been picking up the show for a couple of weeks now, and the reception at my place is nothing remarkable. Perhaps it's the time of night, or something, but ... at any rate, try it. I think it will interest you."

Gresham glanced at his wristwatch, which through some trick of the bad lighting in the bar seemed to have no hands so far as George could see, and pushed back his chair.

"This has been pleasant, Putney," he said, putting out his hand as he rose. "We'll meet again, I'm sure."

George felt suddenly bereft. He had a lot more things to say, important things about himself, and if only Gresham would stay and listen perhaps he could bring the conversation back to where it had been before Gresham's unfortunate diversion. He longed to cling to his hand and make him sit down again, but of course that wasn't done — certainly not by men who called each other Gresham and Putney in the English fashion. So he let the hand go, but protested with the lonely bore's imploring whine, "But how about one for the road? You haven't given me a chance to order a round!"

"Another time," said Gresham with courteous finality. "We'll meet again, I'm sure. Good night, Putney."

George watched the dark figure disappear into the night that waited outside the simulated oak door and looked down at the hand he was flexing. It was odd how hold, even icy, Gresham's hand had been — not at all like their first handshake — but then that was explained by the way he had been playing with his glass. Except for that single sip, he had not touched his drink. George glanced around, then poured it into his own glass and finished it off while he lingered alone, thinking. A strange man, hard to make out — and wrong, surely, about Channel 11.

After a while he went to the bar, asked for the phone book, and looked up the number of a local television station. He could have waited until he got home to call, but he liked the feeling of being seen to make a call from the public phone near the end of the bar, as if he had something going.

The receptionist at the TV station was dumb, as such underlings always are, but after some checking she was at least certain of one thing : there was no Channel 11 anywhere in the area, including the other cities within range.

George checked his watch. Eleven-twenty. In forty minutes' time he could write off Gresham as

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some kind of nut, after giving him the ultimate benefit of the doubt by checking the blank channel at midnight.

The tick of a clock measured out its expected greeting for George when he opened the door of his apartment. Some people had dogs to greet them, some had cats, and of course there were those who had wives and children; George had a ticking clock, an old banjo clock, genuine antique, which he wound with fussy precision each morning at eight.

Resisting the urge to go straight to the television set, he hung up his jacket, kicked off his shoes, put on his slippers, and mixed himself a nightcap. Only then, when he had tested his drink and set it on the table beside his armchair, did he allow himself to flip on the set.

The dial happened to be set for Channel 6. He waited long enough to verify its offering as a Bogart he had already seen at least six times, then turned the knob a single click to 7. Like a famished man trying to stretch starvation rations and make them seem a meal, he prolonged such meager suspense as Gresham's unbelievable assertions could provide.

Channel 7 had late news after a ball game. Channel 8, like 11, was a blank channel. On Channel 9 a blurred Charlie Chan peered at him with studio-slanted eyes, but before Confucius could say anything, George had switched to Channel 10 and a talk show. For an instant his fingertips tingled as he gave the knob its final twist.

The screen went blank, of course, and the sound was mere buzzing. George stared dully for a moment, then went to his chair and sat down heavily to wait for midnight. At the stroke of midnight, or damn soon thereafter, he would switch off the set and curse Gresham — perhaps personally, he thought, and almost got up to look in the phone book before he remembered he didn't know the man's first name.

He took a good pull at his drink and tried to put his mind on a book, but Gresham's face kept getting in the way. What was the matter with the man? If inventing a game show that came on at midnight over a blank channel was Gresham's idea of a practical joke, it was the feeblest one George had ever experienced. And yet, the conviction with which he spoke, the authority! Why, if he came into the bank and put on as good an act as that to get a loan, he could talk that fool Armbruster into any amount of credit he wanted! Vaguely larcenous thoughts slipped in through a dingy entrance in the back of his mind and were promptly — well, fairly promptly—shown the door. A partnership? A brilliant caper of

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some sort? ... Miss Getzel in on it, of course, the two of them ending up together in Rio ...

Stroked by the banjo clock, midnight brought him bolt upright in his chair, and then the television set brought him to his feet. A flourish of trumpets, sharp and clear, overrode the clock's final strokes. A title bold and unadorned, appeared on the screen:

YOU BET YOUR LIFE

George sat down trembling, staring, stunned by the inexplicable and, of course, scrambling for an explanation. "You Bet Your Life"? Hadn't there been a game show years ago by that name? And now that he thought about it, hadn't there been talk of a new TV station that would devote itself exclusively to reruns of old favorite shows — Bilko, Lucy, Jack Benny, Hitchcock, that Rod Serling crap? But why —

The title faded. A man appeared in the center of a shadowy stage, sitting stiffly in a square, heavy armchair, and a voice spoke off camera.

"Good evening, and welcome to 'You Bet Your Life.' Our guest tonight is Mr. Claude Harris, and if he answers his ten questions correctly, he will win the greatest prize the world has to offer — a life worth living. Before we begin the game, let's have a look at what winning will mean to him ..."

A bank check suddenly filled the screen, and to George's practiced eye it had the look of the real thing, with Chase Manhattan's name on it. It was drawn to Claude R. Harris. The amount was one million dollars. As it appeared, the announcer's tone became relaxed and folksy.

"Now, a million dollars is nothing to get excited about these days, of course, A fellow couldn't cut much of a figure on what he'd have left after taxes, could he? But this check represents only the first annual payment Mr. Harris will receive of one million dollars tax-free income. Now, that's more like what our contestant had in mind, isn't it, Mr. Harris?"

A shot of Harris nodding vigorously. Since the camera did not move in on him for a close-up, it was hard to see just how excited he was, but not hard to guess. The tension was already razor-edged.

"Clever. Pretty clever!" muttered George, acknowledging the trick. Denied a close-up of Harris's tension, the viewer supplied that much more of his own vicarious brand.

Back now to a series of shots of the good things of this world, a cornucopia of the stuff of dreams — a stately mansion, a huge yacht, a private plane, a graceful swimming pool decorated with a dozen gorgeous girls in strings, all

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looking voluptuously available ... George sat back and laughed wildly.

"My God, it's a put-on, but what a job!" he said aloud, only to find himself contradicted by the announcer's next statement, solemn to the point of severity as the folksiness vanished.

"And all of this is genuine, ladies and gentlemen, as Mr. Harris well knows. Never doubt that for a moment. When he walks out of here tonight, if he wins, the check you saw will already be deposited to his account. A correct answer to his final question will trigger computerized actions which are irreversible."

A shot of a bank of computers which seemed to be directly behind the contestant. Again the voice changed, became as rollicking as the voice of the silliest host on any of the other game shows.

"And now, on with our game! Mr. Harris's category will be ... sports! Mr. Harris, you will have ten seconds in which to answer each question. Are you ready?"

Music up, and a reprise of the stately mansion, then back to Harris and the announcer's voice, deep and portentous as he intoned the first question:

"What athlete, recently retired, is generally considered to have been the world's greatest soccer player?"

"Pele!' cried George an instant before Harris. The contestant's thin, high voice came over like a shriek.

"Correct!" cried the announcer, and his jovial yelp was followed by a fanfare. Music picked up where the trumpets left off, and the yacht reappeared. In a rapid recall George counted up and realized there had been ten goodies shown, including the check, which would of course be held for last. And so it went with the plane, the Rolls, the art objects, the tennis court, and all the rest of it showing up between questions.

Though sports was not the category he would have chosen, George found no trouble in handling it and doing so even better than Harris was doing. In every case he managed to answer at least a split second more promptly, and on the sixth question, "How many players are there on a polo team?" he had time after answering to say, "Come on, dummy — four!" before Harris finally came up with it. The questions were insanely easy; there had to be a catch somewhere, probably the final one would be a real stinker, but in the meantime the seventh, the eighth, and the ninth proved no harder for either of them, and suddenly there again on the screen was the million-dollar check, and Harris was one question away from everything he wanted, and the announcer was whooping it

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up, making sure everyone knew it.

"And now, Mr. Harris, are you ready for your final question?"

Poor Harris could only nod. And still the camera did not move in any closer, so that it was impossible to get more than an impression of the agonized suspense in his face. George had to hand it to the producer — in its offbeat way the show's production was incredibly good.

"All right, Mr. Harris! Then here it is! Listen carefully. Who is the only relief pitcher ever to win the Cy Young Award?"

"Marshall! Mike Marshall!"

It was George, shooting to his feet, who screamed the answer. Harris was straining forward, his mouth open, but nothing was coming out of it. His eyes had the glazed look of a man's whose mind has suddenly gone blank.

"Say it, stupid, say it — Mike Marshall! You *can't* not know that!"

Seconds were ticking away, precious seconds — was it the banjo clock he heard, or was it a dramatic ticktock they had added to the show's sound effects? — and still Harris sat there with that grotesquely blank look on his face.

"Time!"

The announcer's voice came in with a new depth to it, as somber as the tolling of an iron bell.

"I am sorry, Mr. Harris, but you have lost."

It all happened so suddenly. Semicircles of metal swung up from under the arms of the big square chair and clamped down on Harris's wrists. Another pair swiveled in around his ankles, and a metal cup came to rest firmly on his head. And now, at last, as Harris stiffened convulsively, the camera finally moved in close.

For a moment George watched the limbs contort and the fingers curl and blacken, and then he rushed to the bathroom and was sick in the washbowl.

When he was able to stagger out, the screen was full of goodies again — the mansion, the yacht, the girls — and the announcer, back to his normal, foolish voice, was saying,

"Be with us tomorrow night for another exciting game on 'You Bet Your Life.' Our guest has been chosen and will be notified as soon as we leave the air. But in case he happens to be watching, here is a sneak preview of what we have in store for him, if he wins. His category will be literature ..."

A million-dollar check appeared on the screen. George stared at the name on it, then picked up a book and threw it. He missed the set. The book hit a wall, broke its spine, and plummeted to the floor. He had picked up another when a new sound made him drop it.

The telephone was ringing.

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Harvey Jacobs ("Dress Rehearsal" July 1974) recently published a novel, *Summer on a Mountain of Spice,* which is currently being adapted for the stage.

Things Are Seldom

by HARVEY JACOBS

The man from the government came and checked in at the Hamilton Hotel looking like every other salesman. He took his meals at Bertha's Diner like the rest. He went to the Bijou theater on Main Street. He sat around the lobby of the Hamilton making small talk, and he watched television on the black-and-white set in his room. There was nothing very different about him. His look was normal, his behavior predictable, his grooming conservative. The only thing different, the only thing anyone noticed, and then in passing, was the simple fact that he stayed too long.

Salesmen came and went from Midvale Center, which was the hub for a healthy community that balanced industry with agriculture. Products from Midvale traveled the globe. Study groups from graduate schools of business came to observe there because the town was called "depression proof." Even the weather was good, and the life styles of the citizenry caused envy in other places. Midvale seemed a superb example of the success of quiet, sincere planning. It had its birth in 1945, along with the Atomic Age, and thrived in the Seventies. Problems existed, of course, but they were faced and handled. Handled so well that even the young people did not leave the town. They came home to Midvale after their military service, after years in universities, after sewing the unusual oats.

So when the man from the government came, nobody paid attention. Why should they? He was just another visitor on a mission of his own. Privacy was respected in Midvale, especially the privacy of strangers. It was just that he stayed too long and he never talked about his work or his reason for being. After five weeks at the

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Hamilton, others in the hotel asked questions of themselves. After six weeks, they asked questions of each other. Nobody knew he was from the government, of course, not even the police chief or the mayor. The desk clerk at the Hamilton had a theory of his own. The man made many phone calls. He carried a briefcase as if it were an appendage. He made notes every evening at a corner table in the Jewel Bar. Could it be that the "syndicate" was exploring the possibility of organized vice in Midvale? The desk clerk thought so and said so. After all, the town was prosperous, maturing and growing at a fabulous clip. It was time for the forces of evil to tap at its gates. If the government man had known what the desk clerk whispered, he would have laughed loudly. Naturally, he represented the forces of justice.

Mary Helmley, a tall, thin woman in her thirties, learned the truth of the government man's mission from her husband, Paul.

"Hi, darling," Paul said when he came home from work one night. "How are the kids?"

"Fine, dear," Mary said. She felt particularly good that evening. She wore a new dress and fresh make-up. She had dolled up for no particular reason.

"You look splendid."

"Thank you, kind sir."

"Did you hear about Dr. Philbin?"

"Hear what? I saw him today for my checkup. Don't tell me something has happened to him. Please don't tell me that."

Mary Helmley felt herself tighten. Bad news was coming. Was Dr. Philbin dead? Was that it? Or did he win the Nobel Prize? She adored the young doctor. He had changed her from a sickly depressive into a healthy, responsive human being with his skill and wise guidance. He even encouraged her to have a second child after she had given up hope. That child slept in the nursery upstairs even as Paul mixed himself a Scotch.

"Wait until you hear this," he said.

"What is it?"

"They busted him. He's a phony. He never went to medical school. A man from the government arrested him this afternoon."

Mary Helmley nearly fainted. She reeled, caught a chair, balanced herself and sat down.

"Nice, eh? Unbelievable. How does it make you feel to find out the beloved family doctor was an out-and-out fraud?"

Suddenly Mary Helmley thought of herself sitting naked on his examining table listening to his soft voice while he probed for danger signs.

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"It's true enough. They say that Dr. Philbin is not only no doctor but that he's been arrested ten times before for impersonating professionals. Last time he was a lawyer. Before that, an engineer. Before that, a teacher. Once he was a dentist. Also an accountant, a detective, a Marine officer, a psychiatrist, a film producer and — get this, Mary — a veterinarian. Imagine, a veterinarian. They say he's from Chicago and never got past the third grade."

"I think I'm going to be sick," Mary Helmley said.

"Better not," Paul said laughing. "We have nobody to call. Central City is sending a temporary medical team to town to cover until we can find a replacement."

"But Dr. Philbin is a marvelous doctor. A marvelous man. He took out Charlie's appendix."

"Don't I know it," Paul said. "Where is Charlie?"

"He's having dinner with the Jacksons. Dr. Philbin delivered Noreen."

"I know that too and have the canceled checks to prove it," Paul said. "Still, he's a fraud. One of those remarkable cases you read about but never dream will happen to you. Dr. Philbin is a rip-off genius, crazy as a bedbug, who changes personalities every couple of years. The government man told the reporters its a good thing they got him before he did bad damage to somebody in town. I mean, the man never had an ounce of training."

"This is remarkable," Mary Helmley said, "It gives me the chills. I was there to see him today. I sat with my clothes off in his office."

"I'm aware of that," Paul said. "And don't think I like it. He gave me an examination too. And shots. And polio vaccine. Don't think I like that either. But what can you do except swallow air."

"It must be a mistake."

"No. It's the facts. They already took him to the county jail. They may extradite him to New York. That's where he was a veterinarian."

"In New York?"

"Pets. He treated the pets of the rich. Poodles. Parakeets. Cats. Even horses. They swore by him back there. He must be quite a man."

"He is. He was," said Mary Helmley, crying.

"Why are you crying for a crook?"

"I don't know. I liked Dr. Philbin. Didn't he help us with the baby? Didn't he help me so much? I don't know if I'm crying because of that or from embarrassment. I was sitting in his office just this morning. Did they arrest Charlotte too?"

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"The nurse? No. She never suspected anything."

"Poor Charlotte. They say she and Dr. Philbin were in love."

"I meant to tell you," Paul said. "Philbin had a wife for every identity. Charlotte should consider herself fortunate that he was exposed in time."

"Nothing like this has ever happened in Midvale," Mary Helmley said.

"Bet on that," Paul said.

"I hope they don't hurt him."

"He'll get ten to twenty years behind bars. A man like that is a menace."

"I suppose so."

"I know so."

Things quieted down in Midvale until the next government man came. This time his identity was not such a secret. This time the folks at the Hamilton were ready to speculate on anyone who stayed more than the average three days. And sure enough, they were correct.

"Did you hear the scoop on Harry Burns?" Paul said to Mary Helmley one night.

"What scoop? He was here today to fix the color television."

"Well," Paul said, "he's no TV repairman. Never so much as touched a set before he came here and hung up his shingle."

"No!"

"A man from the Bureau of Consumer Affairs came and got him not more than an hour ago."

"Dear Lord. He was here today. I gave him fifteen dollars."

"Harry Burns was no more a TV repairman than I am. It's lucky they got on to him before he caused a fire or something terrible."

"He did a nice job on our set. I mean, it plays well now."

"Thank your stars. That same Harry Burns who was in this house is wanted in ten states for everything ranging from forgery to illicit acts."

"And you say he never had a single bit of training in TV repair?"

"Never."

"There should be stricter standards," Mary Helmley said.

"Truer words were never spoken," Paul said. "If you paid by check, we can stop it."

"But he fixed the set."

"That's irrelevant, darling," Paul said. "Don't you see?"

"I see, yes, I do see," Mary Helmley said. "But I paid him cash."

"Our luck," Paul said smiling. He took his wife into his arms. "Life in good old Midvale, eh?"

After Dr. Philbin and Harry Burns, it was less of a shock when they arrested Mortimer Tappler, the butcher, for selling horsemeat burgers.

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"We had them last night," Mary Helmley told Paul when he brought that information home.

"The way you prepared them, I never noticed a damn thing," her husband said.

"Spices," Mary Helmley said. "They make a difference."

"My mother never used spices," Paul said. "I guess I've come a long way from Sain Looie."

"Your mother is an excellent cook."

"But never spices. Never. I never heard of spices till I met you, Mary."

The chiropodist went next. Then the lady from the vegetable market. The optometrist followed, along with the mayor and the entire police force. After that, they came for the school principal, the owner of Midvale's largest business, which manufactured electronic parts Mary Helmley didn't begin to fathom, and Homer Train, whom they called "little Luther Burbank" because of his work with plants, flowers and the cross breeding of cattle. Every single one of them had come to Midvale from somewhere else (as had most of the adults), and not one of them was what he or she seemed to be. Quite the contrary. All of them were as shady as the Godfather with closets full of howling ghosts.

"It's getting so that one doesn't know where to shop," Mary Helmley said to Paul.

"Worse," Paul said. "This town was written up in seven major magazines. It's a national scandal. Poor Midvale. There's chatter downtown about bulldozing the whole place. Starting fresh and all that. Scattering the people."

"That sounds extreme," Mary Helmley said.

"There are always extremists," Paul said. "Still, you've got to admit there's a germ of an idea there.

"Sam Pokker was indicted today. The clothes he sold were 30% yak wool, not nylon polyester like it says on the label."

"I bought a pants suit from him on Monday."

"Did you charge it?"

"Oh, no. I'm sorry, sweet."

"But I did tell you, Mary...."

"You did. I had all this cash is the problem."

"I distinctly...."

"You did."

They came for little Charlie the same day they came for Paul. Charlie was no child, really, but a former circus midget. Mary Helmley was very upset. On top of that, finding out that Paul had never gone to pharmaceutical school was the last straw. Or is it pharmacy academy? No matter, his diploma came from a matchbook advertisement. He was filling all

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those prescriptions by instinct and intuition. The government man said it was a mercy that everyone muddled through, considering. Mary agreed.

"Mom," she said on the telephone, "now that Dr. Philbin is gone and Paul and Charlie have been revealed for what they are, I think the baby and I will leave Midvale. There's hardly anybody left. Why, today the gas station attendant admitted selling diluted fuel. He mixed it with tap water. And the liquor store made name-brand labels on a printing press and stuck them on in the back of the store. I'm coming home if you'll have me."

"Don't be a quitter," Mary's mother said. "Remember what poppa used to say. 'Hang in there.' Besides, the same thing is happening all over these days. Standards are lower."

"I suppose you're right. And Paul will be out in a decade or so with good behavior. He does behave nicely. He always did."

"Yes, Mary, I'll go along with that."

"Maybe I'll stay here in Midvale until Christmas. By the way, the plastic tree I bought last year turned out to be real, just coated with chemicals. It's falling apart."

"My, my. I suppose there are needles everywhere."

"There are. It's a messy mess. That's life."

"A woman's work is never done."

"Now that they've sealed off the town from those awful news people with their awful cameras and questions and stories, it's a chore just getting to the country to buy a nice plastic tree."

"Problems are existence," Mary Helmley's mother said. "That's what poppa used to say. By the way, honey, he wasn't really your poppa. Your real poppa was an acrobat."

"Which explains the baby's agility," Mary Helmley said.

"Bye now. And don't loose your spirit."

Mary Helmley hung up the telephone and prepared for a visit from the bridge club ladies. She barely had time to bake the cookies, make a pot of tea and mark the cards.

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Films

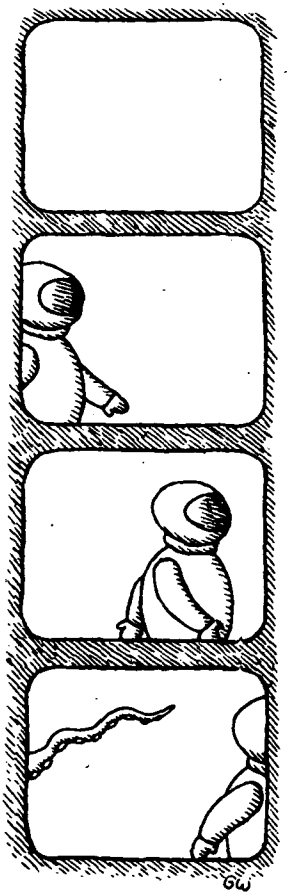
BAIRD SEARLES

ROLLERBORE

Rollerball is a team sport played with motorcycles, roller-skates, studded gloves, and a metal ball of a deadly weight. It has "taken the place of war" in a future world divided into corporate rather than national entities.

Rollerball is also the name of a movie to be avoided, a movie calculated to appeal to fans of contemporary sports and fans of contemporary movies, i.e. fans of contemporary violence. It is so patently cinema as surrogate for lions, Christians and gladiators that one is embarrassed at pointing out the obvious. However, at least the Romans were fairly honest about their bloodlust; here, after 2000 years of the Christian ethic, we disguise it. The film caters to that which it pretends to decry.

Aside from that, Mrs. Androcles, how was the show? *Rollerball* is slickly and expensively produced, but apart from the three big games (or come to think of it, *including* the three big games — it's not a terribly riveting sport), it's dull as dishwater. As drama, the question of why the #1 rollerballer is being forced out of the game is one you cease to care about almost immediately. As science fiction, it portrays one of those not-too-near futures where dress, make-up,



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architecture and dialogue are no different from any reasonably sophisticated contemporary examples.

I could go on at some length, but have only one more point worth bringing up. The use of "classical" music as background was a brilliant stroke in *2001*, effective in *Zardoz*, and tedious and derivative here. Apparently filmmakers believe that the public thinks it isn't s/f if it doesn't have Beethoven, Shostakovitch and Bartok playing pointlessly underneath.

To conclude, I suspect my vehemence against the film is occasioned by resentment of, not only its expensive production, but an underlying intelligence (probably traceable back to its literary takeoff point, a short story I don't have the means at the moment to track down). These positive qualities could have been used so much better, dammit!

Artos Redux. Last month I talked about an Arthurian film, which despite the madness of the proceedings, was a stunner visually (*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*). Curiously enough, there is another Arthurian film around, this one from France and called *Lancelot of the Lake*. This one is dead serious, but also visually interesting in an entirely different way.

The director is Robert Bresson, who has had an enormous critical reputation for nearly three decades, but whose comparatively few films have never caught on with the public. It is not hard to see why this is; a Bresson film is static, intense, a very personal statement unleavened by a trace of humor or glamor.

He has handled the Lancelot legend in just this way, taking the last days of the Round Table when few of the Knights are left (this is *not* a spectacle), and exploring the Lancelot-Arthur-Guinevere situation with a dry lack of passion which reduces it to a bloodless question of duty.

But I'm always interested to see how the created-world of Arthurian legend is envisioned by filmmakers. The basic myth, consisting as it does of a primitive post-Roman Britain overlayed with a post Renaissance romanticized view of Medieval glamor, is a wonderful theme for infinite variations of conception. There is the stolid unimaginative MGM *Knights of the Round Table* of the early '50s, the ultra-romantic fairy tale vision of *Camelot*, the darker aspects of British legend evoked (at times) by the Monte Python film.

Bresson's Lancelot is, as I said, small scaled. Camelot is a large stone building whose courtyard is full of campaign tents. The costumes are mostly full armor (the

(*continued on pg. 119*)

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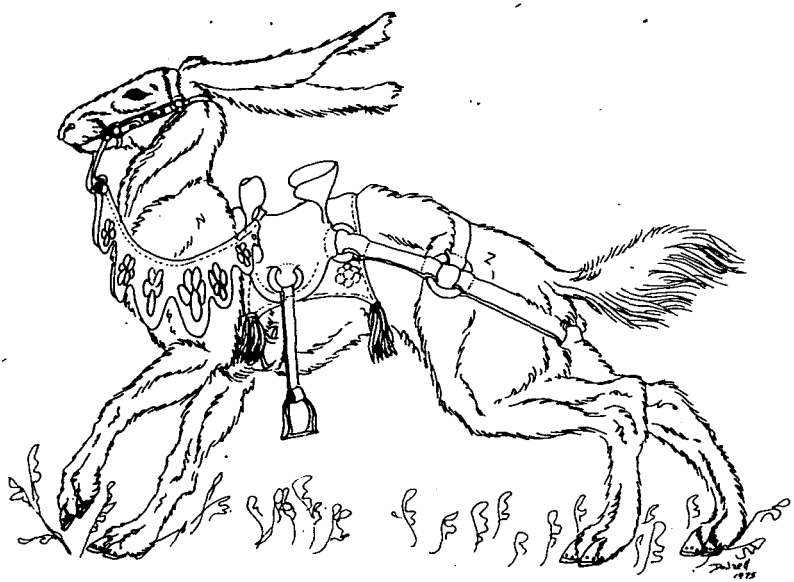
Bonnie Dalzell, b. 1944 Pasadena, BA Paleontology, Univ. of Calif., Davis, MA Univ. of Calif., Berkeley, admitted to PhD program at Univ. of Calif., Berkeley in Zoology. Ms. Dalzell also has a Saab named Fred, two huge Borzoi dogs, and during a recent visit to our office conceived the idea of . . .

PAGES FROM A TWENTY-SECOND CENTURY ZOOLOGIST'S NOTEBOOK

Part 1: The Saddle Rabbit.

by Bonnie Dalzell



The riding rabbit illustrated in figure 1 is decked out in the neo-mediaevil harness characteristically used at tourneys sponsored by the Society for the Recreation of History (more or less). We have chosen this particular illustration as it is of the prolific foundation buck of the light saddle rabbit line, Hal's Nimble-foot of Razmsgaard.

As you know, following the disasterous mutant anthrax epidemic of 2112, mankind emerged relatively unharmed. (In fact, better off as the starving millions of the so called "disadvantaged countries"

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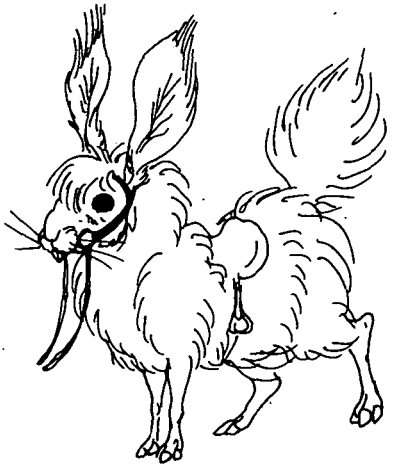

were no more.) Unfortunately the hoofed mammals of the world, prime targets of the deadly bacillus, were also no more. Although only the irredeemably antisocial ungulatiophiles mourned the loss of the barbirossa or the dwarf water buffalo, man in general missed the docile herds which had for so long provided him with steaks, porkchops, leg of lamb, and parimutual racing. No longer would sensoria audiences empathize with the white-hatted good guys as they loped into town astride their faithful cowponies.

Mankind's hunger for prime meat and the two dollar ticket could not long be held in check. Bioengineers of the Heydt Combine, a powerful west coast technical corporation (which traced its origins back to mythical 20th century figures), were the first to establish a genetically stable, true breeding, physiologically healthy line of neo-ungulatiform mammals. These were derived from a small domestic species, the common rabbit (*Oryctolagus cunniculus*).

It had long been possible to grow giant domestic forms from small stock. In the absence of extensive surgery and hormonal modification, the animals were short-lived and only moderately successful when enlarged more than three times the size of the parent stock. Apparently greater enlargements violated Nature's rigidly enforced Square-Cube Law (Article V, Paragraph 3, to be precise). The giant surgically and hormonally treated individuals were successful but, of course, did not breed true.

The Heydt bioengineers accomplished controlled evolution in a period of only thirty years through mutation magnification and extensive breeding. It is indicative of the prevailing economic pressures that

(*Continued on pg. 49*)

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Like many of Joseph Green's contributions, this story takes place off-Earth, poses a solid SF problem and solves it within a suspenseful narrative. Traditional and superior fare, and most welcome.

Last of The Chauvinists

by JOSEPH GREEN

Delanoy Street felt certain he had found Speartrue, at long last. This was the most impressive man he had ever seen.

The savage facing Del was tall, hard-muscled, with that lean toughness of meat and sinew found only in primitive people. There was gray at both temples, but only a few lines on the beardless brown face. He looked about forty, in Earth-years. Yet Del knew that Speartrue was past three hundred. This man had been a baby on Islandia when George Washington was President of the infant United States.

The hot white light of Altair beat down mercilessly on the rolling grassland, but the temperature was bearable under the many clumps of trees. Del was wearing the heavy one-man back-flyer with which he had dropped down to check band after little band, day after day. He was hot and sweaty, but exultant. The search he had carried on intermittently for four weeks was finally over.

"I greet you as a friend. I do not want food." Del used the basic tongue and waited, finger on the life control. No two bands reacted alike — and these people seemed dangerously tense and edgy.

The tension lasted only a moment. The patriarch stepped forward and grounded the point of the long, flint-headed shaft that gave him his name. "Be welcome, man from 'arth. We have food. Join and share."

Speartrue used still another dialect Del had not encountered, and the word "share" and to be interpreted from context. But he remembered where people who dressed like Del were from, and there was no hostility in his manner. The other males still glared suspiciously at their visitor.

This band was one of the largest Del had seen, about twenty people.

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It was very much unlike the others in that there were only four children. The exigencies of a gatherers economy required small concentrations of people. In a band where all lived for hundreds of years, barring accidents or disease, there could be few young ones. They either had some crude form of birth control, as did many primitive people, or practiced infanticide.

"My spirit is easy because Speartrue remembers my people from 'arth," Del said, as he followed the naked brown man to the small campfire. He had already turned on the recorder built into his clothes. Sound was no problem, but he had to remember to keep turning his torso; the lens disguised as a large clear button had a narow field of view.

The women of the band wore breechcloths made of animal skins, the only clothing used. None appeared old, but most were scarred and had missing teeth. Probably half of them belonged to Speartrue.

Despite his disclaimer regarding food, Del accepted some fruit when it was offered. They squatted around the low fire, where the one anachronism present — an endurometal pot from Earth — bubbled softly in the coals. Judging by the stalks he saw piled to one side, they were preparing another batch of *li'lili* crystals.

"I ask if the mighty people of 'arth have heard the cry of Speartrue," the band's leader inquired, after the ritual of eating together. "For many growing seasons the Stinkbugs have come in larger numbers, putting up more of the little-bright-sticks-that-hurt Soon there will not be enough land from which to gather food. The other families will starve."

Del noted that Speartrue was not worried about his own band. Three hundrd years of experience had made them the largest and strongest group on the island. That was because they had kept the secret of the li'lili plant to themselves. Now it was to be shared with the four billion people of Earth — though presumably not with the small bands that competed directly with Speartrue's.

"My people have heard the cry of Speartrue," Del said, choosing his words carefully. "The one who talked with you three seasons ago, whom we call Norman, could not return. I came in his place. The li'lili food you gave him keeps us strong and fast-footed, as it does you. Our people want more of the li'lili, and they are as many as the leaves on the trees around us. The *Ril'ilya*, or Stinkbugs as you call them, have offered to grow all the li'lili my people need. To do so they must take more and more land each year."

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There was a moment of silence. Speartrue had an intelligence potential equal to Del's, or that of any normal human. Physiologically these savages were virtually identical to *Homo sapiens*. Culturally they had changed little in five thousand centuries. The planet's peculiar geophysical history — a single huge continent around the equatorial belt which had sunk, leaving thousands of large islands — had kept them isolated into relatively small groups. The warm climate and lush vegetation made it possible for them to live as simple gatherers — and they had done so, for all those millenniums. They did not travel over the ocean, any memories of the days when the world was larger were long forgotten. Every band thought the island on which they lived the only land in a vastness of water.

One of Speartrue's sons said something to his father, in a fierce whisper. The older man nodded thoughtfully. The women tended the fire; one placed another handful of thumb-sized li'lili seeds in the pot. The brown syrup inside bubbled and boiled, emitting thick chuckling sounds. The crystals that condensd out of the liquid were the most valuable substance ever discovered — they were life itself.

Speartrue finally spoke "We are people," he said slowly. "You are people. The Stinkbugs are not people. If they hide away the land, we will die. Do the men of 'arth know this?"

"No, but we will tell them. Among our people, each person decides what is good. When most agree, then we speak with one voice. We must all do what that one voice decides, even if some do not like it."

Speartrue nodded. He was an absolute dictator in his small world, but he could understand the basic concepts of democracy.

"If my people showed your people how to have more than enough food — would you, and all the people like you on all the islands — would you dig in the ground every day, grow the li'lili plants, and boil pots and pots full of the white crystals for us?"

A look of eagerness, quickly repressed, flickered across Speartrue's sun-browned face. "For much food, the people would do those things!" he declared.

"Then I will go back to my people and tell them the words of Speartrue. In time I will come again, when the words of the one voice have been decided. Until then may you find much food."

The man who was probably the oldest human in existence looked disappointed. He had evidently expected Del to commit all of mankind to oppose the Stinkbugs.

Del walked deeper into the

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trees, until he was hidden in the eye of the sun. Del found a clear spot overhead and lifted off to meet it, stopping a thousand kilos up and letting the pilot make the actual rendezvous.

When Del was inside the single tiny airtight compartment, the airsled rose almost vertically until the atmosphere thinned, then built up speed for the long trip back to Ril'ilya Island. The Space Service pilot attempted to start a conversation, but desisted when Del answered in monosyllables. In two hours they had traveled eight-thousand kilometers south and east, and were slanting down again.

The Ril'ilya airport was a beehive of activity, as usual, and they had to await clearance to land. Two of the stubby, wide-winged transports were waiting to take off, one was landing, and a fourth circled in a holding pattern. They were propeller-driven and slow, but carried surprisingly large loads.

Del stared, brooding, at the busy scene below. It was unfair to think of the Ril'ilya as Stinkbugs, despite their strong odor and insect origin. They had evolved and prospered on this southernmost and coldest landmass. They used every available hectare of surface and tunneled beneath it as well, but their burgeoning population had forced them to colonize the one nearby island. Now even it was growing crowded, and they had started a strong shift on both from self-sufficiency to heavy industry. The development of flight had enabled them to utilize the tropic islands to fulfil their growing need for agricultural land.

Strange, how psychological factors could so strongly influence development. A Ril'ilya sank like a stone in water. Fear of drowning had kept them confined to the home island until they invented the airplane; they still did not have boats. But after colonizing the visible small island nearby they had explored the rest of their world in a rush, finding the great chain of what had once been grassy plateaus circling the equator. They had ignored the tall bipeds they found on almost all of them, except to fence them out of their new fields.

When the first ship from Earth had landed in Islandia, three Earthyears ago, the Ril'ilya had experienced severe cultural shock. They were accustomed to thinking of humans as large dumb animals.

The pilot finally took them down, settling smoothly toward the stretch of crushed rock that formed the runway. Del experienced a familiar moment of fear. Buildings, some of them four and five stories in height, lined the clear space solidly on both sides. This was the only landing strip on the island,

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and even its apparent reservation of open space was illusory — underneath it was a warren of tunnels and storerooms.

Kenton Forakman was waiting at the entrance to the small hangar the Ril'ilya had furnished the landing party. The starship, with most Space Service personnel still aboard, was waiting in orbit. Only the scientific contingent and a small military support crew had landed. All were under the direction of Kenton. At first Del had disliked this small, soft-spoken man because he was a diplomat, and neither scientist nor military explorer. But Kenton Forakman had slowly earned his grudging respect. The silver-haired older man had a broad grasp of humar motivation that Del admired.

"Hello, Del. Obviously you finally found Speartrue, or you wouldn't be back so early. How did it go?"

"I'm not sure," Del admitted, as they walked toward their living quarters at the rear of the hangar. The black carapaces and bullet heads of the Ril'ilya were everywhere, loading and off-loading cargo with busy efficiency. Their beetle-shaped trucks arrived and departed in endless streams, distributing the imported food on which they were rapidly becoming totally dependent.

"The old fox assured me that humans would gladly handle the farming chores, given the tools," Del went on. "He also indirectly confirmed what we suspected, that he told Norman about the immortality drug because he wanted to enlist our help against the Ril'ilya. I didn't commit us, of course."

"But you would like to?"

"Of course I would! Those people are as human as you and I. It was just blind luck that the Ril'ilya evolved and grew on this single island, which wasn't caught in the cataclysm that broke up the main continent. In a competitive situation the humans would have eliminated them early in the game."

"Very probably," agreed Kenton. "Do you suppose being in a colder climate where food was scarce forced the Ril'ilya into developing their industrial civilization?"

"That's one of the accepted theories." The two men entered the equipment room and Kenton helped Del remove his back-flyer. "We don't know if it applies to insects, though; needs more work." Del was the senior anthropologist in the party, and a nominal second-in-command to Forakman.

The wall against one side of the semiopen building had been turned into an impromptu laboratory. Rand Vanderwell, the group's

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chemist, looked up from his molecular scanner. "Hello, Del. Bad news, Kent. I can't find any affect on root growth rate from those applications of auxin a and b. We can still try heteroauxin, but Terri thinks it will be a waste of time."

Terri Vanderwell was the biologist, and Rand's marital partner. She was working at the next bench. "Total waste," the petite brunette said cheerfully. "There just isn't any way, people. We either grow the li'lili plants here, or we prepare to glass in half the land on Earth and put half the people to work on them. I'm positive any trade-off study between transportation expense and Earth growth will heavily favor transport. Besides, all available arable land back home is needed for other crops."

"We'll go over your results at the meeting in the morning," Kenton said with a smile. "Don't give it all away in advance."

"Aren't we really just confirming what we knew before we landed?" asked Del.

"Perhaps. But I've always understood that positive confirmation was a basic of science. We must make some very important recommendations to the World Council. The more hard facts we have, the more weight our report will carry."

"But one of those 'facts' is that the savages are fully human! Another is that we might never have known of li'lili if Speartrue hadn't told Norman about it. How do you equate gratitude with transportation expense, or the cost of greenhouses?"

"Speartrue wasn't being altruistic. The obvious proof of that is the fact his family kept the longevity secret hidden even from the other bands on his particular island. He needed help. Having but one valuable commodity, he put it up for sale."

"And we bought it — on credit. When and how much do we pay for the most wanted knowledge in the history of mankind?"

"That isn't for us here to say. The World Council sent us here to see if Islandia can produce twenty-thousand kilos a day of li'lili crystals, so that each of the four billion living humans can receive his daily five milligrams. How to accomplish this is what we will decide tomorrow morning."

The words were a gentle hint to stop the discussion. Del took it. A little miffed, he went to his cubicle, a converted toolroom. But he was barely inside when a light knock sounded by the entrance and the cloth barrier whisked aside. Colonna Prieto stooped under the low facing and entered. She was accompanied by a Ril'ilya.

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Del tried to keep his disgust from showing. Possibly he smelled bad to a Stinkbug. But the odor was almost overpowering in a closed room. The Ril'ilya were totaly unaware of their own body scent, and so far no human had had the nerve to mention it.

They were also not responsible for their looks. Ril'ilya walked

They were also not responsible for their looks. Ril'ilya walked upright, supported by four angled double-jointed legs attached to the lower abdomen. This resembled a huge black egg standing small end-up. The thorax also resembled an egg, this time small end-down. Two arms similar to the legs sprouted from the shoulders. They ended in semicircular hands with eight flexible digits, without an opposing member. The head was cylindrical in shape, descending straight into the shoulders like a piece of pipe. It came equipped with sharply curved mandibles, a wide mouth filled with sharp cutting ridges, and very large faceted eyes. Del had never been able to overcome his initial impression of giant black beetles who had somehow learned to walk upright.

"Hi, Del. Heard you were back." Colonna was the second anthropologist, young, beautiful, and theoretically Del's assistant. Actually they had divided the work. She was preparing a profile of the Ril'ilya, while he tackled the more arduous task of finding and studying Speartrue and his family. The idea of turning the savage nomads into farmers to produce li'lili crystals was Del's own plan, sparked by his discovery there were probably several million humans on the thousands of islands girdling the planet.

"Del, this is Richey — as close as I can pronounce it. The Queen's Council has just appointed a committee to study the problem of the savages, and Richey is heading it. He wants our opinion of how difficult it would be to round up the little bands on the farm islands and transport them to vacant ones."

Richey produced one of the pocket symbolizers the humans had made, and focused it on the wall. Verbal communication was impossible; human and Ril'ilya throats did not make the same sounds. But Del, Colonna, and Kenton Forakman had memorized the eighty symbols that formed the Ril'ilya written language, then taken lessons in grammar and usage from the group linguist. Del pulled out his own symbolizer, focused, and waited.

The Ril'ilyan flashed an image that resembled a bent leg, followed quickly by one that reminded Del of a bird's wing. They normally started with the action to be

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performed, and those two meant "move," modified by "haste." The subject was a three-part symbol which indicated humans. The two-part modifier following meant savage. Then four symbols for land mass, or island, appeared twice, the first followed by the word old, the second by new. It translated to "We/Us (actor understood) propose/think the savage humans should/must be moved from their present islands to new ones (identities unspecified)." The next sentence stated this was an action proposed/required for the welfare of the savages. (*Now where have I heard* that *before*? Del thought.) And then Richey solicited Del's ideas (human's combined intellect/experience) on the long-term effects on the savages of such a forced move.

But Del was not prepared to answer that question yet. Instead, he spelled out that more research would be required; an answer would be furnished at a later date.

If a lipless mouth and waving mandibles could express disappointment, Richey exhibited it. But on the wall he flashed the equivalent of "Thank you for your consideration," and left.

"Why have the Stinkbugs suddenly decided the savages need 'protection'?" Del asked Colonna.

"They want to enlarge their farms on the four best islands to the point where the unfenced land couldn't support human foragers. They plan to kill off the larger animals, to keep them from slow starvation. Whether this would have included the savages if we hadn't contacted them three years ago is an interesting question."

"This rapid expansion is needed because they plan to grow li'lili for us?"

"Yes. Otherwise they could continue their usual practice of dispersing the farms over an entire island, leaving the native inhabitants alone."

"But with a few power tools and some training teams from Earth, the humans could plant those fields themselves. They could grow li'lili and earn the technology and trade goods we plan to give the Stinkbugs."

Colonna looked troubled. "I suppose so. But wouldn't that take eighteen or twenty years? The Ril'ilya can supply our needs in four. How many humans would die who might be saved in that extra time?"

"I don't know. I do know that if we deal only with the Ril'ilya, encourage them to expand even more rapidly than at present, they're soon going to need all the land on the planet — and several million savage but perfectly human beings are going to die!"

"Kent has a full staff meeting

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scheduled for nine in the morning. We'll get a chance to go over this question then. Incidentally, the ship just relayed down the last news from Earth. On the weekly Issues and Answers plebiscite Sunday night, the voting public thumbed the 'no' window seven to three against enlarging the space fleet."

"The public has always grumbled at the cost of space exploration. Don't worry, that decision will be reversed as soon as they learn the space program has brought them a thousand-year lifespan. And the government can't keep it a secret much longer."

"But the general public won't wait twenty years for the li'lili," said Colonna. "Talk to you after dinner." And she was gone.

But Colonna did not return to his cubicle after eating. Del had to get his personal observations down while they were still fresh and did not seek her out. He worked late and was one of the last to breakfast at the communal table next morning. He had barely time for some last-minute notes while the table was being cleared before Kenton Forakman called the group together.

In addition to the Vanderwells and the two anthropologists, the ground party included Hardy Trumbull, the linguist; his marital partner Sissy, an architect; Tosiko Takamura, a physicist specializing in power systems; Millie Kotlewski, a meteorologist; and Mildred and Millicent Deveraux, fraternal twins and both agronomists. Lieutenant Shipley of the Space Service support crew also attended. He commanded three crewmen as well as the airsled pilot.

"I called for a formal review today because we seem to be far enough along for some preliminary conclusions," Kenton began. "This is going on my personal recorder, but all words spoken, in anger or otherwise, can be expunged on ship when we transcribe. Please remember the operative word is 'preliminary' — all opinions are subject to modification on receipt of more facts. Let's begin with Mildred and Millicent."

The Deveraux sisters, gray-haired, delicate-appearing little women who were tough and highly experienced field investigators, read a prepared report. It confirmed what Colonna had told Del the night before. By simply scaling-up present farming operations, the Ril'ilya could produce twenty-thousand kilos of li'lili crystals a day in four years time. The increased transportation between islands might put a strain on the Ril'ilya air transport system, but that was the only obvious problem.

"Would you address that point, Tosiko?" asked Kenton.

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"Surely." Tosiko spoke without notes or reports, leaning back and looking at his clasped hands. "The fear of water which let the Ril'ilya develop air transport ahead of ships has resulted in an interisland cargo-hauling system of relatively high speed but low bulk capacity. Until their population began expanding at the present rate, it was adequate for their needs. To help them fulfill their own growing requirements and ours as well, I propose to show them how to construct surface effect vehicles for over-water travel. Their existing expertise in aeronautics should make this an easy development task."

"Excellent. Please continue along that line. Rand and Terri, I know your thinking, but please share it with the rest of the group."

"Our thinking is that we regret to be the first to report bad news," said Terri. "All our efforts to increase either the size of the li'lili seed or the growth rate of the plants have ended in failure. But we've only been here four weeks, and our equipment is limited. Give us four years instead, and a fully equipped laboratory . . . anyway, our *preliminary* conclusion is that growing this sensitive, delicate plant on Earth would be prohibitively expensive. It seems to be fertilized by only one type of insect. It needs the strong trace of argon this atmosphere contains. Sunlight less intense than that of Altair isn't blue enough. And there are a host of other smaller problems. At this point we feel growth on Islandia is the only practical answer."

Kenton nodded. "Millie, can you tie a long-range weather forecast in with plans to grow twenty-thousand kilos a day of li'lili crystals?"

Millie Kotlewski looked startled; evidently she hadn't expected to speak. "Well, uh . . . yes, Kent, based on my study of the Ril'ilya records Hardy translated for me. The weather in the equatorial belt resembles that of Earth fairly closely. We can expect from fifteen to thirty major storms a year, of which an average of five will hit perhaps twice that number of the larger islands. I can't give damage estimates. I understand the li'lili is more delicate than most of the other cultivated crops."

"That's still very helpful, Millie. We can calculate the amount of land needed to be in cultivation to cover likely loses. Del, I know you finally found Speartrue and his band yesterday. And I think you have some recommendations you want to put before the group."

Del shuffled his notes a moment, then looked up and around the waiting circle of faces. "Yes, I found Speartrue. And I want to tell you a little about him.

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He has a — a kind of air, a bearing it's difficult to describe. I hope I live to be three hundred, just to acquire some of the dignity and *presence* that man has. I felt like a young and very ignorant student meeting a learned professor." He paused before adding, "And I hope you all do meet him. If my suggestions are heeded, you will."

"Now I've noticed a mutual assumption in all the reports so far. Everyone seems to take it for granted the Ril'ilya are the people we should deal with for li'lili production. I ask you — why? Why should we bargin with a completely alien species — one not even from our family tree — when we have native human beings on this planet? It's true they are very primitive, according to our cultural standards — but physiologically they seem identical to us, our equals in potential intelligence. And there are probably several million of them, scattered over all the islands. My suggestion is very basic, very simple. Assert the ownership rights of these people against further colonization by the Stinkbugs. Bring in teams to every major island and train the natives in agronomy, including the immediate use of power equipment. Let them, not the Ril'ilya, benefit from contact with our more advanced civilization. The Bugs can learn birth control, rather than plan on continuous expansion."

There was silence around the table. Most eyes were on Kenton.

The old diplomat seemed lost in thought. Finally he sighed, looked up, and asked, "From the group as a whole, please: How many years to full production if we adopt Del's suggestion and train the savages?"

There was a buzz of conversation, some short, sharp exchanges, and finally a consensus. Tosiko spoke for the group. "Kent, we think it would take a minimum of twenty years to turn that many gatherers into productive farmers. Ethically we would have no choice but to teach them how to prolong their own lives. And what would happen in the future, when they reach a point where they understand the value of the li'lili crystals, is totally unpredictable."

"The same thing can be said of the Stinkbugs!" Del said sharply. "Do we want that kind of club held over us by these insects?"

"Would you speak to that point, Colonna?" asked Kenton.

"If you wish," the pretty brunette answered. "My report is almost complete, in first draft. The Ril'ilya are the most honorable, dependable, social-minded intelligent species we have encountered to date. A great deal of the totally co-operative attitude of the hive has been preserved in their social

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structure. By our standards they are not very democratic, since the Queen's Council determines all matters of policy, and council members are simply the largest and strongest males. But that is an internal matter and shouldn't affect relations with us. It is my opinion that any reasonably equitable exchange we work out with the Ril'ilya will be implicitly honored. And I would like to point out that the li'lili seeds are of no real value to them. They aren't even a favorite food, much less a longevity drug."

"We have an important factor here I'd like everyone to consider," said Del, choosing his words with care. "Most of the World Council members are rather old. They may be swayed against training the humans for purely selfish reasons, if the Stinkbugs are presented as an equally sure and faster source of supply. I consider this proposed agreement with an alien species highly questionable. I feel our report should emphasize the importance of an available supply of human labor, given a somewhat longer development period."

Forakman nodded. "Heard and noted, Del. I will include your viewpoint in my preliminary recommendations, as specifically yours. Now if there are no further reports, we will adjourn at this point.."

Feeling angry and frustrated, and uncertain of just what he had accomplished, Del returned to work on the prior day's recording. He discovered very quickly that one thing he had done was alienate his lovely co-worker. Colonna assisted when asked, with quick and impersonal efficiency — but there was a noticeable chill in her attitude.

But that scarcely mattered. Not when measured against saving millions of human beings who would otherwise be eventually squeezed out of existence.

Del decided to return to Speartrue's band next day and start behavioral studies. He needed some evidence of primitive human co-operation, to counter Colonna's damning report on Ril'ilya dependability.

The island where Speartrue roamed was a large one, and his band had traveled a long distance in two days. It was near dusk when Del finally spotted them. He recognized two of the sons and one crippled older woman. Speartrue himself was not with them.

Del descended some distance away as usual, with the sun at his back. The walk of less than two kilometers left him hot and breathless. To his surprise, the band had vanished when he entered the trees. They had evidently ·ist

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left. Their fire was still smoldering.

Del stared at the dying flames, feeling an odd prickling on his neck. Then he noticed a shiny object almost hidden under some firewood, and he stooped to brush away some branches covering the endurometal pot. As he did, something *thrummed*! through the air above his back. He looked up, alarmed, in time to see a hard brawny arm hurl a second spear. He leaped to one side, sprawling in the dirt, and it too missed.

The males of the band burst from cover, screaming and throwing more spears. One smashed into Del's left thigh, just above the knee; he felt excruciating pain. But then his finger was on the back-pack life control, and he sat up and pressed it in one swift motion. Two more spearpoints passed through the air where he had been as he shot upward at full acceleration

Del was fortunate; the tree branches over his head were small ones. He burst through and into the clear, feeling a sharp spurt of new pain on his right cheek. It was nothing compared to that in his leg. The spearpoint had penetrated through muscle to the bone, probably cracking it.

A final spear rose out of the greenery, but was far too low to touch him. Del's brain began working again. Trying to ignore his pain, he moved the control to neutral and then slightly down. Hovering just above the height the spear had reached, he peered down through the shadowed leaves. The band was gathered in the small clearing, the women and children having joined the men. They were pointing at him and yelling among themselves.

The leg hurt so much that Del had difficulty concentrating. Both it and his scraped cheek were bleeding heavily. He forced himself to focus on the upturned faces below. Their leader was still not there.

"Where is Speartrue?" Del yelled down at the savages. "Why do you hunt my blood? I would give you food!"

One of the brown men raised his spear and shook it in the air. Del recognized the son who had advised Speartrue on his previous visit. "Our hunter is dead! We took his life! I am the hunter now!

The shock gave Del a momentary feeling of vertigo. It seemed unbelievable that so much life and vitality, the calm and assured majesty of a man like Speartrue, could so easily die.

Fights for dominance could arise at any time — but it seemed strange that this one had happened so soon after his contact. *"Why did you kill Speartrue?"* Del called down. "He was a mighty hunter!"

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The man on the ground lowered his spear. Evidently an enemy who had been driven away, even if into the air, was no longer a threat. "Our father did not listen! He told you mild-faces of the li'lili! If all know, the people will grow like the grass! Soon we cannot find food. Only we must cook and eat the li'lili!"

And there was the motive — simple, pragmatic selfishness, based on total ignorance of the real situation. Speartrue had had a glimmering, some faint understanding of what contact with Earth could mean. Possibly he had realized how much power the Ril'ilyan grasp of technology gave the black beetles. But his sons, although some must have been only a generation younger, lacked the older man's broad grasp.

There was no point in attempting an argument, even if his throbbing leg had permitted it. Del called for the airsled to come after him and rose to meet it.

The pilot did a creditable job of bandaging both the leg and Del's scraped face, after applying an antiseptic coagulant. Del took a pain killer and relaxed for the trip back. By the time they arrived he was drowsy and dizzy. Terri Vanderwell, the best medic on the ground, cleaned his wounds and rebandaged them. Del swallowed a powerful temporary antibiotic, one guaranteed to kill any germs that might have gotten into his wounds, and passed into a dreamless sleep.

Two days later Del hobbled to the table for the regular morning staff meeting. He was leaning on a crutch to relieve his cracked femur, but otherwise felt fully recovered.

"Welcome back to the world!" called Hardy Trumbull. "I hear you had a little communications problem with your primitive innocents."

"Oh, they got a message through to him," said Colonna, smiling. She no longer seemed unfriendly. In fact she had helped him with his report the previous day.

"Have you changed your mind about training the savages, Del? asked Rand Vanderwell, but the tone was whimsical and pleasant.

Del grinned at him, but sobered at once. "No, I haven't changed, I'm still opposed to neglecting humans to deal with Stinkbugs."

Kenton Forakman called the meeting to order in his usual informal manner. "We can keep this one short," he announced. "The main thing I have for you is instructions to wrap up your current projects as quickly as possible. The planetary shuttle will be down for us in three days."

There was a groan of disappointment around the table. But

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that same anguished moan would have sounded if they had been at work five years instead of five weeks. Everyone except Kenton felt the surface had barely been scratched on Islandia.

"And I presume the proposed agreement with the Ril'ilya is going through?" Del asked, trying to keep his voice even.

Kenton nodded. "The World Council approved it yesterday, Del, based on a special referendum held the night before. All the facts were fully explained, including your recommendation that we train the savages. Word had — ah, leaked out about the effect of li'lili crystals on human metabolism, and the government had no choice but to make a public announcement. The voters thumbed the 'yes' glass seven to one to trade with the Ril'ilya."

Del felt a rush of blood to his head and grew faint for the first time since his long sleep of two nights past. The room slowly steadied again. He leaned forward and buried his face in his hands, but looked up again immediately.

"Del — a new fact was included in the presentation, one of which you are unaware. Chemists on Earth have broken the structure of the li'lili crystal. We can produce it from the castor oil plant, much cheaper than we can haul it from here. Nevertheless, I will sign an agreement before we leave, and trade will begin shortly."

Del jerked erect in astonishment. "But — *why?* If we don't need them, why...?"

"Because the Ril'ilya need *us!* It is against their ethics to accept free help. Hence we must receive goods in return, and they have nothing else to offer. We will supply them with more sophisticated technology as fast as they can profitably absorb it. Del . . . let me remind you that of the several thousand intelligent species we have met to date, only the Ril'ilya are of insect origin. The people of Earth decided it was worthwhile to pay a higher price to continue our association with them. As for the savage humans — the Ril'ilya will not need to expand their farms for our benefit. We will spread the secret of preparing the li'lili crystals to the many thousand small bands, and they can develop or fall according to their increased capabilities."

"The Ril'ilya will exterminate them," said Del, his voice bleak.

"I doubt that. They are already starting birth control, through the simple expedient of not hatching all the queen's eggs. They plan on a society of optimum size — about double the present fifty million."

A Ril'ilya appeared in the door, saw the humans were in conference, and paused, waiting. Kenton went on, "Del, you are an unconscious and perhaps incurable human

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chauvinist. Your attitudes date back to the days when we were confined to Earth, before we made contact with the almost infinite variety of intelligent lifeforms in our galaxy. Emotionally you are a throwback to the days when humans separated themselves according to skin pigmentation or the shape of their eyes — and when minority peoples such as your own Australian aborigines were treated as inferiors by the larger society, incidentally. Most people today have outgrown those attitudes, Del. They recognize what you do not — that similar cultural levels give sapients more in common than similar physiology, that we are far closer in every important way to the Ril'ilya than the savage humans."

Kenton gestured to the silent, waiting Ril'ilya. "Here is your true brother on Islandia."

(*Films, from pg. 101*)

sound of which is an aural *motif* throughout; the film's sound track is almost all clanking mail and neighing of horses). There is a casual disregard for "historical" accuracy. This is a primitive Camelot, but the fabrics on peasants and gentry alike are obviously hand woven, the knights wear leather braces under their armor, and the tents are almost the rectangular canvas types one associates with WW I. Oddly enough, this consistent inconsistency accomplishes one of the prime aims of fantasy creation; it establishes its own reality.

The ending of the film is also a solid accomplishment; low-keyed as the rest of it, it presents the revolt of Mordred and his faction as forest skirmishes, just briefly glimpsed. The fall of knighthood is symbolized by repeated shots of riderless horses careering through the forest and finally, Lancelot, mortally wounded, collapses on the piled bodies of his fellow knights. The final shot is of a heap of obsolete metal, impossible to tell from the junkheaps of discarded cars, stoves, and refrigerators that litter our own contemporary countryside.

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Science

ISAAC ASIMOV

BEST FOOT BACKWARD

In my more self-pitying moods, I feel more and more as though I alone am defending the bastions of science against the onslaughts of the new barbarians. Therefore, although I may be repeating bits and pieces of statements I have made in previous articles, I would like to devote this one, in its entirety, to such a defense, which, I warn you, will be an entirely uncompromising one.

Item 1 - You would think that in a publication like *New Scientist*, an excellent British weekly devoted to articles on scientific advance, there would be no space given to simpering anti-scientific idiocy. Not so!

In the May 16, 1974 issue, one of the magazine's feature writers, having delivered himself of a fairly incoherent defense of Velikovsky, went on to say: "Science in its 200-year flight has produced some neat tricks like canned food and long-playing records, but, truthfully, how much else of real value to man's threescore years and ten?"

I promptly wrote a letter in which I said, in part:

"...one thing you might consider to be of real value *is* man's threescore years and ten. ...through most of history it has been more

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like one score year and ten. May we expect a bit of gratitude from you for those extra forty years of life you have the chance of enjoying?"

The letter was published and, in no time at all, in the July 11, 1974 issue there came a blast from a gentleman from Herefordshire whom I shall call B. He felt, apparently, that longer life had its disadvantages, since it helped bring on population explosion, for instance. He said also:

"...those benighted times Mr. Asimov mentions that had a life expectancy of good deal less than three score and ten did still manage to produce Chartres, Tintern, Raphael, and Shakespeare. What are the modern equivalents? Centre Point, Orly, Andy Warhol, and SF?"

Noting the dig at science fiction and guessing from whom he meant to draw blood, I felt justified in removing the velvet gloves. In my answer I said, in part:

"B. goes on to point out that short-lived men in centuries past produced great works of art, literature and architecture. Is B. advancing this as an odd coincidence, or does he maintain the cultural advance of the past came about *because* men were short-lived?

"If, indeed, B. resents the extended lifetime science has made possible, and finds it destructive to humanity, what does he suggest? It would not be difficult, after all, to abandon the advances of science, to allow sewage to creep into our water supply, to eschew antiseptic surgery, to give up antibiotics and then to watch the death rate rise to a level that will quickly produce (by B.'s novel line of argument) another Shakespeare.

"Should B. indeed welcome this, would he recommend that the benefits of a heightened death rate be applied only to the benighted heathen of other climes, the lesser breeds of darker color, whose accelerating rate of passage might then make the globe more comfortable for the men of Hereforshire? Or does his rigid sense of fairness cause him to recommend that all nations, his own included, participate in this noble endeavor? Does he, indeed, intend to set the example himself by manfully and nobly refusing to have his own life extended by science?

"Has it, in fact, occurred to B. that one answer to the population explosion brought on by the advance of science and medicine is to lower the birthrate? Or does he, perchance, find the lowering of the birthrate repugnant to his sense of morals, and does he much prefer the glamor of plague and famine as a cure for overpopulation?"

That letter, too, was printed, and there came no answer.

Item 2 - I get private communications, sometimes, that express an individual's dissatisfaction with the modern world of science and

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technology, and call for a quick retreat, best foot backward, into a pre-industrial world of nobility and happiness.

For instance, a letter arrived recently from a professor of something or other who had gotten himself a farm and was growing his own food. He told me jubilantly all about how great it was and how healthy and happy he felt now that he was freed of all that horrible machinery. He did use an automobile, he admitted, and he apologized for it.

He didn't apologize for the fact that he used a typewriter, however, and that the letter got to me by way of our modern system of transportation. He didn't apologize for the use of electric lights or the use of the telephone and so I assume he read by the light of a wood fire and sent messages by semaphore.

I simply wrote back a polite card wishing him all the joy of the medieval peasants, and that elicited a pretty angry reply that enclosed an unfavorable review of my book "Asimov's Annotated 'Paradise Lost'. "(Ah, yes, I remember now, he was a specialist on Milton, and I think he objected to my invasion of the sacred precincts.)

Item 3 - Once, during the question-and-answer session that followed one of my talks, a young man asked me if I honestly believed science had done anything to increase man's *happiness.*

"Do you think you would be just as happy if you had lived in the days of ancient Greece?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied firmly.

"How would you have enjoyed being a slave in the Athenian silver mines?" I asked with a smile, and he sat down to think a bit about that.

Or consider the person who said to me once, "How pleasant it would be if only we lived a hundred years ago when it was easy to get servants.'

"It would be horrible," I said at once.

"Why?" came the astonished answer.

And I said, quite matter-of-factly, "We'd be the servants."

Sometimes I wonder if the people who denounced the modern world of science and technology are precisely those who have always been comfortable and well off and who take it for granted that in the absence of machinery there would be plenty of people (*other* people) to substitute.

It may be that it is those who have never worked who are perfectly ready to substitute human muscles (not their own) for machinery. They dream of building the Chartres cathedral — as an architect and not as a peasant conscripted to drag stones. They fantasy life in ancient Greece –

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as Pericles and not as a slave. They long for Merrie Olde Englande and its nut-brown ale — as a Norman baron and not as a Saxon serf.

In fact, I wonder how much upper-class resistance to modern technology arises out of a petulant dissatisfaction over the fact that so many of the scum of the Earth (like me, for instance) now drive automobiles, have automatic washers and watch television — thus reducing the difference between themselves and the various cultured aristocrats who moan that science has not brought anyone happiness. It has diminished the grounds of their self-esteem, Yes.

Some years ago there was a magazine named *Intellectual Digest* which was run by very nice people but, alas, didn't survive for more than a couple of years. They had run some articles denouncing science and felt that perhaps they ought to publish an article supporting science — and they asked me to write one.

I did and they bought it and paid for it — and then never published it. I suspect (but do not know) that they felt it would offend their clientele who may have been, for the most part, members of that branch of soft-core intellectualism that considers it clever to know nothing about science.

That audience was, perhaps, impressed by an article by Robert Graves, which was reprinted in the April, 1972 issue of *Intellectual Digest* and which seemed to argue for the social control of science.*

Graves is a classicist, brought up in the British upper-class tradition in the years prior to World War I. He knows a great deal more about pre-Christian Hellenism, I am sure, than about post-industrial science. which makes him a dubious authority on the matter of scientific discovery, but this is what he says:

"In ancient times, the use of scientific discovery was closely guarded for social reasons — if not by the scientists themselves, than by their rulers. Thus the steam engine invented in Ptolemaic Egypt for pumping water to the top of the famous lighthouse on the Island of Pharos was soon abandoned, apparently because it encouraged laziness in slaves who had previously carried waterskins up the lighthouse stairs."

This, of course, is purest horse-radish. The "steam engine" invented in Ptolemaic Egypt was a pretty little toy that couldn't have pumped water one foot, let alone to the top of the Pharos.

**So am I, providing the control is exerted by those who know something about science.*

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Yet never mind that. Graves' cautionary tale is true in essence even if it be false in detail. The Hellenistic Age (323-30 B.C.) did indeed see the bare beginnings of a kind of industrial age, and that this advance bumped to a quick halt may have been, in part at least, because slave labor was so available that there was no great demand for machines.

In fact, it is even possible to present a humanitarian argument against industrialization to the effect that if machines replaced slaves, what would one do with all the surplus slaves? Let them starve? Kill them? (Who says aristocrats aren't humane?)

Graves, then, and others like himself, seems to be pointing to the social control of science in ancient times as being directed toward the preservation of slavery.

Is this, indeed, what we want? Are all the anti-science idealists to march bravely into battle under the banner of "Up With Slavery"? Or, since most anti-science idealists think of themselves as artists, gentlemen farmers, philosophers, or whatever, and *never* as slaves, ought the banner read "Up With Slavery For Other People"?

Of course, some deep thinker may point out in rebuttal that the kind of factory life made possible by modern technology is not better than the lot of the ancient slave. Such arguments were used prior to the American Civil War to denounce the hypocrisy of free-state Abolitionists, for instance.

This is not an altogether foolish argument, and yet I doubt that any factory hand in Massachusetts would have voluntarily agreed to be a Black farm hand in Mississippi under the impression that the two professions were equivalent. — Or that a Black farm hand in Mississippi would have refused to become a factory hand in Massachusetts because he felt that was no improvement over slavery.

John Campbell, the late editor of *Analog Science Fiction,* used to go further. He believed (or pretended to believe) that slavery had its good points and that everyone was a slave anyway. He used to say, "You're a slave to your typewriter, aren't you, Isaac?"

"Yes, I am, John," I would reply, "if you want to use the term as a metaphor in my case and as a reality in the case of a Black man in the cotton fields of 1850."

He said, "You work just as long hours as the slaves did, and you don't take vacations."

I said, "But there's no foreman with a whip standing behind me to make *sure* I don't take vacations."

I never convinced him, but I sure convinced myself.

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There are people who argue that science is amoral, that it makes no value judgements, that it is not only oblivious to the deepest needs of mankind but entirely irrelevant to them.

Consider the views of Arnold Toynbee, who, like Graves, is an upper-class Englishman who spent his formative years before World War I. In an article in the December 1971 issue of *Intellectual Digest*, he said,

"In my belief, science and technology cannot satisfy the spiritual needs for which religion of all kinds does try to provide."

Please note that Toynbee is honest enough to say "try."

Well, then, which would you prefer, an institution that does not address itself to spiritual problems but solves them anyway, or an institution that talks about spiritual problems constantly but never does anything about them? In other words, do you want deeds or talk?

Consider the matter of human slavery. Surely that is a matter that should exercise those who are interested in the spiritual needs of mankind. Is it right, is it just, is it moral, for one man to be slavemaster and another man to be slave? Surely this is not a question for a scientist, since it is not something that can be solved by studying reactions in test-tubes or by observing the shifting of needles on the dials of spectrophotometers. The question is for philosophers and theologians, and we all know they have had ample time to consider it.

Throughout the history of civilization, right down to modern times, the wealth and prosperity of a relatively small number of people has been built on the animal-like labor and wretched existence of a large number of peasants, serfs and slaves. What have our spiritual leaders had to say about it?

In our western civilization, at least, the prime source of spiritual comfort is the Bible. Look through the Bible, then, from the first verse of Genesis to the last verse of Revelation and you will find not one word of condemnation of slavery as an institution. There are lots of generalizations about love and charity, but no practical suggestions as to governmental responsibility for the poor and unfortunate.

Look through all the writings of the great philosophers of the past and you will find scarcely a whisper of condemnation against slavery as an institution. To Aristotle, it seemed quite clear that there were people who seemed to be fitted by temperament to be slaves.

It was, indeed, quite the other way around. Spiritual leaders very often rallied to the support of slavery as an institution, either directly or indirectly.There were not wanting those who justified the forcible

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abduction of African Blacks into American slavery by saying that they were, in this way, made into Christians and that the salvation of their souls more than made up for the enslavement of their bodies.

Then, too, when religion caters to the spiritual needs of slaves and serfs by assuring them that their Earthly position is God's will and by promising them a life of eternal bliss after death if they do not commit the sin of rebelling against God's will, who is benefited more? Is it the slave whose life may be made more bearable in the contemplation of heaven? Or is it the slavemaster who need be that much less concerned with ameliorating the hard lot of the downtrodden and that much less fearful of revolt?

When, then, did slavery come to be recognized as a grievous and unjustifiable wrong? When did slavery come to an end?

Why, with the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, when machines began to replace muscles.

For that matter, when did democracy on a large scale become possible? When the means of transportation and communication in an industrial age made it possible to work out the mechanics of a representative legislature over wide areas, and when the flood of cheap machine-made goods of all kinds made the "lower classes" into valuable customers who deserved to be coddled.

And what do you suppose would happen if we turned away from science now? What if a noble young generation abandoned the materialism of an industry that seemed to be concerned with things rather than with ideals, and moved, best foot backward, into a world in which everyone moaned and whined about love and charity? Why, without the machinery of our materialistic industry, we would inevitably drift back to a slave economy, and we could use love and charity to keep the slaves quiet.

Which is better? Amoral science which puts an end to slavery, or spirituality which in thousands of years of talk didn't?

Nor is slavery the only point we can make.

In the pre-industrial age, mankind was subject to the constant onslaught of infectious disease. All the love of parents, all the prayers of congregations, all the lofty generalizations of philosophers could not prevent a child dying of diphtheria or half a nation dying of the plague.

It was the cold curiosity of men of science, working without value judgements, that magnified and studied the forms of life invisible to the unaided eye, that worked out the cause of infectious disease, that demonstrated the importance of hygiene, of clean food and water, of

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efficient sewage systems. It was that which worked out vaccines, antitoxins, chemical specifics, and antibiotics. It was that which saved hundreds of millions of lives.

It was scientists, too, who won the victory against pain and who discovered how to soothe physical anguish when neither prayer nor philosophy could. There are not many patients facing operations who would demand spiritual solace as a substitute for an anesthetic.

Is it *only* science that is to be praised?

Who can argue against the glories of art, music and literature that existed long before science did? And what can science offer us to compare with such beauty?

For one thing, it is possible to point out that the vision of the Universe made apparent by the careful labor of four centuries of modern scientists, far outweighs in beauty and majesty (for those who would take the trouble to look) all the creations of all human artists put together, or all the imaginings of mythologists, for that matter.

Beyond that, it is also a fact that before the days of modern technology, the full flower of art and of the human intellect was reserved for the few who were aristocratic and rich. It was modern science and technology that made books plentiful and cheap. It was modern science and technology that made art, music and literature available to all and brought the marvels of the human mind and soul to even the meanest.

But hasn't science and technology brought us all sorts of undesirable side-effects from the danger of nuclear war to the noise pollution of hard rock on transistor radios?

Yes, and that's nothing new. Every last technological advance, however primitive, has brought with it something undesirable. The stone-tipped axe brought mankind more food — and made war more deadly. The use of fire gave mankind light, warmth, more and better food — and the possibility of arson and of burning at the stake. The development of speech made mankind human — and liars, one and all.

But the choice between good and evil is man's —

In 1847, the Italian chemist, Ascanio Sobrero, produced nitroglycerine for the first time. He heated a drop of it and it exploded shatteringly. Sobrero realized, in horror, its possible application to warfare and stopped all research in that direction at once.

It didn't help, of course. Others followed up the work, and it, along with other high explosives, was being used in warfare within half a century.

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Did that make high explosives entirely bad? In 1866, the Swedish inventor, Alfred Bernhard Nobel, learned gow to mix nitroglycerine with diatomaceous earth to produce a mixture that was completely safe to handle and which he called "dynamite." With dynamite, earth could be moved at a rate far beyond the pick-and-shovel efforts of all the ages before, and without brutalizing men at hard labor.

It was dynamite that helped forge the way for the railroads in the final decades of the 19th Century, that helped build dams, subways, building foundations, bridges and a thousand other grand-scale constructions of the industrial age.

It is after all, mankind's choice whether to use explosives to construct or to destroy. If he chooses the latter, the fault is not in the explosive but in mankind's folly.

Of course, you might argue that all the good that explosives can do isn't worth the harm it can do. You might argue that mankind is incapable of choosing the good and shunning the evil and therefore, as a pack of fools, must be denied explosives altogether.

In that case, let us think back to the medical advances that began with Jenner's discovery of vaccination in 1798, Pasteur's enunciation of the germ theory of disease in the 1860s and so on. That has doubled man's average life-span, which is good, and has brought on the population explosion, which is bad.

As far as I can see, hardly anyone objects to advances in medicine. Even today, when so many people are concerned about the dangers of scientific and technological advance, I hear hardly any protests against research into the causes and cure of arthritis, circulatory disease, birth defects or cancer.

And yet the population explosion is the most immediate danger mankind faces. If we avoid nuclear war, counteract pollution, learn to economize on our natural resources, and advance in every field of science, we will nevertheless be destroyed in a matter of decades if the population explosion continues unchecked.

Of all mankind's follies, that of allowing the death rate to drop faster than the birth rate is the worst.

So who's for the abolition of medical advance and a return to a high death rate? Who will march under the banner of "Up With Epidemics!" (Of course, you may consider that epidemics are okay on some other continent — but they have a bad habit of spreading.)

Well, then, shall we pick and choose? Shall we keep medical advances

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and a few other noble examples of scientific progress and abandon the rest of technology? Shall we retire to farms and live in blameless rural splendor, forgetting the wicked city and its machines?

But the farms must have no machinery either; no powered tractors, reapers, binders and all the rest. They must be without synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, which are the product of an advanced technology. They must be without irrigation machinery, modern dams and so on. They must be without advanced genetic strains that require plenty of fertilizer and irrigation. It has to be *that* way or you've got the entire mechanism of industrialization about your neck again.

In that case, however, world farming can support about one billion people on Earth, and there happen to be four billion on Earth right now.

Three billion people, at least, have to be removed from the Earth if we're to become a planet of happy farmers. Any volunteers? No fair volunteering other people; is there anyone who wants to volunteer *himself* for removal. — I thought so.

In the same article, previously cited, in which Toynbee talked about spiritual needs, he also said:

"The reason science does succeed in answering its questions is that these questions are not the most important ones. Science has not taken up religion's fundamental questions, or, if it has taken these up, it has not given genuine scientific answers to them."

What does Professor Toynbee want? Through advances in science we have ended slavery; brought more security, health, and creature comfort to more people than was dreamed of in all the centuries before science; made art and leisure available to hundreds of millions. All this is as a result of answering questions that "are not the most important ones." Maybe so, Professor, but I am a humble man and these unimportant questions seem pretty good to me if that's what they bring.

And how has religion answered its "fundamental questions." What are the answers? Is the mass of humanity more ethical, more virtuous, more decent and kindly because of the existence of religion, or is the state of humanity rather a testimonial to the failure of thousands of years of merely talking about goodness and virtue.

Is there any indication that some particular group of mankind under some particular religion is more moral or more virtuous or more decent than other groups of mankind under other particular religions or, for that matter, under no particular religion — either now or in the past. I never

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heard of any such indication. If science could point to no better record of accomplishment than religion could point to, science would have vanished long ago.

The Emperor has no clothes, but superstitious awe seems to prevent the fact from being pointed out.

Let's summarize it, then —

You may not like the route taken by modern science and technology, but there is no other.

Name any world problem and I can tell you that although science and technology *may not* solve it, anything else *can not* solve it. So you have the choice: Possible victory with science and technology, or certain defeat without it.

Which do you choose?

COLLECTOR'S ITEM:
AUTOGRAPHED SPECIAL SILVERBERG ISSUE

Our April 1974 issue honored Robert Silverberg and featured "Born With The Dead," the highly acclaimed novella that recently won a Nebula award.

Less than 200 of these issues have been signed by Robert Silverberg, and we offer them while they last for $3.00 each, which includes postage and handling.

The special issue also features a profile of Silverberg by Barry N. Malzberg, an article, "Robert Silverberg, The Compleat Writer" by Thomas Clareson, a Silverberg bibliography and a special cover by Ed Emsh.

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Arthur Jean Cox ("A Collector of Ambroses," September 1971; "Straight Shooters Always Win," May 1974) brings his distinctive touch to this first-rate story about a boy who was "seeing things . . ."

The Boy in The Iron Mask

by ARTHUR JEAN COX

In the late summer of 1929, two boys sat on a rustic footbridge crossing a wooded stream.

They were talking about *The Man in the Iron Mask.*

"It's showing Saturday at the Strand," said one of the boys excitedly. "I can hardly wait. There's only one show this time, in the afternoon, because of my dad's lodge meeting that night. And you can bet I'm not going to miss that show! I've been waiting for it for months. I've read all about it, you know."

He probably had. His name was Phillip Carter and he was a great bookworm and moviegoer. Or, anyway, as great a moviegoer as circumstances would allow: The one theater in his little town opened its doors only on Saturday. In looks...well, the twelve-year-old Phil might have appeared, with his light-brown hair and blue eyes, on the cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* as the Representative American Boy — the freckles across the bridge of his nose not yet being obscured by spectacles.

The other boy, who was about the same age, looked as if he had never read a book in his life (perhaps he hadn't, outside of school), but he loved movies almost as much as his friend. "It must be just about the best motion picture ever made," said this boy, with infinite faith. "You say D'Artagnan and the Three Musketeers are in it? Who's the Man in the Iron Mask?"

"Douglas Fairbanks," replied the knowing Phil. "He plays two roles. The Man in the Iron Mask and King Louis the Fourteenth."

"King Louis?" said the other boy. "Hah!" For Louis was *his* name. "I have to see that! But, you know ... my mother says a lot of her folks are coming to visit that day, and I'll bet she wants me to

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hang around the house all afternoon."

Phil winced. "Golly, that's a fate worse than death — to miss *The Man in the Iron Mask.* But, look here, if you do miss it, I'll come and tell you all about it. In great detail. Because one thing is certain," he added, settling back rather complacently against the rickety wooden railing that guarded one side of the footbridge — which was nothing more than two rows of 2" x 6" slats supported by trestles — "one thing is certain, and that is that *I* am not going to miss that picture."

There was a noise of squawking protest, not unlike the creaking of a rusty hinge on a barndoor, and the splintery rail against which he was leaning gave way — tore loose, exposing ugly rust-encrusted nails — and Phil, with a distinct but helpless consciousness of the irony of the situation, found himself sprawling clumsily backward and off the bridge.

He fell towards the water, head downwards but looking up, arms and legs spread. He saw his friend's face framed between his feet: an intensely interested, peering face. Phil's brief life did not pass before his inner eye, but it could easily have done so, for he was able to take note of a good many memories, thoughts and possibilities almost simultaneously. One of the possibilities was that he might drown, for he couldn't swim.

He hit something, something so hard that at first he thought it was one of the round rocks lying at the bottom of the marvellously clear stream. But it was only the water itself. It fringed out around him and closed back over him. He sank. He gasped for air, choked on water. It hurt, terribly — like gulping down marbles. He touched bottom and went up again. He struggled and strained for the light and air, his eyes bulging, and saw Lou, far above him, pushing back the nail-barbed railing that had swung back almost into place, and stepping calmly off the bridge, as from the deck of a ship.

He himself had never been so calm, but he knew that no one seeing him would believe that. Eyes and mouth wide, he was thrashing the water frantically, as if in a paroxysm of impotent rage, like that king in the history books who had ordered the sea flogged because it had balked him. But, inside, he wasn't really upset or afraid at all; and when a hand grabbed him unexpectedly by the hair and he felt himself being tugged backwards to the bank, he resented it as an indignity.

He touched the bank, twisted about, clawed feebly at the grassy slope; he lay half in the water, half

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out, his body shaking as with some inexhaustible grief, water spilling from his eyes, ears, mouth and nose. When the water had ebbed enough so that he could raise his head, he saw Lou's pale face regarding him anxiously. Lou's very pale face — with the strong contrast of a red liquid trickling down the side of his head from his temple and disappearing beneath his wet collar.

"It's nothing," said Lou, with a smile and a grandly casual gesture that Douglas Fairbanks might have envied. "A mere scratch. I hit a rock going down."

Phil scrambled to his feet. "We'd better get up to the house and have mom take a look at that."

Lou tried to help him up the bank, but needed as much help himself. The two, each thinking he was supporting the other and each being right, trudged the narrow well-scuffed path to Phil's back door, some fifty yards from the creek.

"Now, Lou," exclaimed Phil's mother, as they staggered in, the screen door banging noisily behind them, "Now, Lou, what have you been up to?" For Lou was the more mischievous of the two and was often in trouble. "My God!" she cried, next moment, "you're hurt! How pale you are! Come into the living room and lie down on the couch. Lie down, Louie. No, no, never mind —" For he had started to protest that he would get the couch all wet ... but, despite this scruple, he sank down upon it anyway. She looked at the "scratch," as he had called it. The very light touch of her agitated fingers caused more blood to gush forth. It matted his hair, spilled upon the cushions, dripped to the rug. "Phil! Run and call Louie's mother while I wash this — no, the doctor first! Run down the road to Dr. Vredenburg's. I'll get the antiseptic from the cupboard —"

"Don't bother," said the twelve-year-old Louis Julius Ullmann. "Don't bother: I'm dead."

And so it seemed. His eyes glared at the ceiling; the coursing stream of blood slowed to a trickle. Phil's mother stared. A wail burst from her, as if ripped from her bodily: *"Oh, my God! What shall I tell his mother? — his poor mother!"*

But Lou wasn't quite dead yet. His white lips trembled ... and there rose from them into the silence of the room a wraithlike whisper, rather curious and striking:

"Well ... *The Man in the Iron Mask* shows Saturday at the Strand, anyway."

All this happened on a Thursday. Phil came into the house the next afternoon just as his

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mother was hanging up the receiver of the telephone on the wall of the hall.

"Phil, the funeral is tomorrow afternoon. Louie's mother wants you to be one of the pallbearers. You can wear the dark suit we got you for grandma's funeral. It'll still fit, and I have a pair of white gloves ..." She stopped at the sight of his face. "Yes, I know, dear. He was your best friend, but ..."

But there was something in her son's face that made her pause again, something that was not grief.

"I ... I want to go to the pictures tomorrow," he blurted. "It's my only chance to see *The Man in the Iron Mask.* They're having that meeting of dad's lodge in the theater tomorrow night, and they can't show it Sunday because of those darn Sunday laws. If I don't see it tomorrow afternoon, I never will ..."

"Listen, dear, I know you've been looking forward to seeing that show, but this is more important. You'll see many moving pictures in your life, but you won't have many friends like Louie."

His clouded face was lighted by an inspiration. "*He* would have wanted me to see the picture. His last words were about *The Man in the Iron Mask.*"

"Oh, Phil! Phil!" His mother shook her head, half laughing, half crying. "How can you? Your best friend, the boy who saved your life! Don't you see how it would look if you're not at the funeral? And at a picture show! And it's not only Louie who counts. It's his mother. You're going for her sake, not just for his."

Phil, his fists clenched at his sides, stared, stunned by the threatened loss, at the wreathing pattern of the hall carpet, which looked, he noticed for the first time, something like a large stylized face: a mouth of sorts, a nose of sorts, eyes. His own face was almost as immobile: a mask of sullenness.

His slightly plump good-natured mother studied him briefly. "Forget about that trashy picture, Phil," she said finally, turning away. "You're going."

She heard a muttered remark escape his clenched teeth — "Oh, I'm going, all right!" — but decided to ignore it.

The next day he made good his word. They were preparing to leave the house for the funeral parlor when Phil broke a long silence to announce that he was going to the bathroom. His lanky father, who was sheriff of Bunyan County, gave him a cool appraising glance, for there had been something portentous, almost defiant, in the announcement.

They heard the toilet flush, the

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water run in the basin. After a while, Sheriff Carter glanced at his watch. "What is he trying to do — see how far he can run up the water bill?" He tried the knob. "Damn! He's locked the door. Phil, Phil!" — pounding — "Come out of there."

But there was no response. Carter was almost, but not quite, determined to be mad. His wife, in her dark suit, white gloves and cloche hat, stood looking on. A thought alarmed her. "You don't suppose ...?"

That didn't seem very likely to him, really. But his razors were in the cabinet in there, and other imaginative boys had tried to kill themselves for reasons just as silly. And from inside the bathroom the sound of the water twisting down the dark drain never ceased.

Carter turned and ran through the kitchen and out the back door. As he came around the side of the clapboard house, he saw, to his relief, that the bathroom window, which swung outward, had been pushed wide open. The stepladder was lying in the grass some yards away. He propped the ladder against the window, climbed inside the room, turned off the water, and, unlocking the door, opened it to reveal his wife's stricken face.

"It's okay, Cora. The kid's run off to that damned show. He won't be there long, though."

Shucking off his dark coat, he made his way, now trotting, now walking, to the picture theater two streets away. Sometimes his heavy feet fell like hoofbeats upon echoing board sidewalks, and sometimes they fell silently enough upon dirt and dry grass, and he was again conscious that Rosewood — a very few years before it had borne the ignominious name of Stumpville — might easily lapse back into country if he weren't vigilant. Chickens scattered from before him. A cow browsing in Mrs. Brown's back yard, a block from the Civic Center, raised her head to look at him as he trotted by. He turned left and therefore west on Main Street, the far end of which (three hundred yards off) was blocked by the lumber works, and slowed to a more sedate pace as befitted its metropolitan concrete. Casting a proprietary glance at the combination jail, courthouse, post office and county building across the way, he turned into the entrance of the Strand Theater. He exchanged a few joshing words with Ed Foley, the manager (and, like himself, a Dread Potentate of the Masquer's Lodge, meeting this evening) and borrowed a flashlight.

He expected to find Phil sitting about the tenth row back, near the aisle. He didn't, though. To his increasing surprise, he couldn't find Phil at all. He walked slowly,

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peeringly, up from the front of the theater in the left-hand aisle. The place was packed for this one showing and not just with kids. All those assembled faces were turned one way, staring at the images floating on the screen: images huge, pale and silent as ghosts. Something in the spectacle of so many rapt faces all uniformly addressed in one direction struck him as being both contemptible and chilling. To dispel that slight touch of fear, he turned and glanced at the screen. Douglas Fairbanks in fancy dress confronted — to Carter's surprise — a second Douglas Fairbanks, also in fancy dress though of a simpler cut. He felt a touch of contempt at the childishness of such playacting ... and then a wry amusement as he thought of the costumes he was going to be seeing in a few hours in this very place. Turning back to his task, he crossed the front of the auditorium to the right-hand aisle. Mrs. Brown, the owner of the cow, thumped the piano.

Sitting in the first seat of the first row in the right-hand aisle was Barney Smith, or Barney Google (as the kids called him), gurgling with a kind of awe-struck happiness as he gazed upwards with his goo-goo-googly eyes (as the kids would say) at the screen. Sheriff Carter laid a heavy index finger on the middle-aged man's shoulder. "Don't make a fool of yourself, Barney," he advised. And Barney, abashed, his harmless gaiety extinguished, dropped his eyes to the shadowy floor and fell silent. Carter continued up the aisle, scrutinizing the clusters of childish faces.

There! There was — some kid, not Phil. Puzzled, he peered closely. He knew that face, but couldn't put a name to it, felt that provoking thread of exasperation one always feels in such situations. The boy, about Phil's age, deliberately ignored him for some seconds, then turned a look upon him that was ... what? Questioning? Ironical? Insolent? Carter couldn't quite decide. But what did it matter? It wasn't Phil. He moved on. He checked the toilet and even the broom closet, then handed the flashlight back to the politely unquestioning Ed Foley and left, very disgusted with his son and very mystified.

The funeral proceeded well enough without Phil, his place beside the coffin being supplied by a previously unsuspected cousin. As Sheriff Carter filed by that open-faced crate for the conventional last glimpse of the dead, he was surprised by a pang of real pity for the "deceased," as he would have termed him in a report. Louie lay there so very prim and

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still — which, of course, wasn't at all like him! — that you might almost have thought that a wax dummy had been substituted at the last moment and the still-living boy was wandering around somewhere, up to his old mischief. He was All Boy, that kid! Not like — well ... and the sheriff felt another pang, a pang of envy and resentment. Skipping the funeral like this was the only time Phil had shown any real spunk.

They had murmured something to Mrs. Ulmann, Louie's mother, about Phil being sick, and she, poor woman — she was a widow, her husband having been killed some years ago in a logging accident — instantly assumed that he was sick with grief for his friend: a diagnosis that mortified them both considerably. And now, to their further mortification, she insisted on stopping by their place to comfort the sick boy. They humored her, hoping that Phil would be at home and moping in his bedroom when they arrived; that way they could preserve the fiction that he wasn't well. But he was not at home, and it was impossible to pretend that he was. There was some puzzled conjecture among the relatives as to what had happened to him — for, of course, the entire funeral party had come along, and the driveway, yard and road front of the Carter residence were clogged with their dark cars. There was a general agreement that the boy was wandering about distracted with grief, and one of Lou's uncles, a fat man with a mottled bald head like a creek-bottom stone, went so far as to suggest that the creek be dragged, as if Phil might have gone out to finish what his friend had interrupted. As they speculated, they all ate and drank, and Carter was beginning to remind himself pretty often that he didn't know any of those people, other than Mrs. Ulmann. He wanted very much to try on his Masquer's costume and have Cora make any needful alterations before it was too late, but he could hardly do so while they were here. It would be just too ridiculous to appear before the mourners in that yard-wide hat with the white feather, the velvet mask, the black cloak, and the rest of the get-up.

As he was resignedly thinking all this, the bathroom door opened and Phil incongruously issued forth. Everybody stared at him. It wasn't possible that he had been in the bathroom all this time because several of the visitors had already had occasion to investigate its interior; and his demeanor, as he raked the assemblage with his eyes, was so obviously defiantly guilty that it was no use pretending that he was either sick or

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grief-stricken. Mrs. Ulmann, her eyes wide, a half-eaten dish of strawberry ice cream in her lap, raised a trembling and disillusioned hand to her mouth. Phil saw her. His eyes sank and his face reddened — as if reflecting the light of a glowing forge where some iron contrivance was being fashioned (this was his father's audacious simile, remembering how Phil's face had looked standing beside Felix's forge that night they took the quasi-official Buick in for repairs).

Carter brushed by Phil, saying as he did so, "Go to your room," and stepped into the bathroom. Suddenly clairvoyant, he lifted the lid of the clothes hamper and saw lying on the rumpled towels a pair of dime-store glasses, a soft cap and a striped sweater. So! Lon Chaney, Junior, huh? The Boy with a Thousand Faces. Or two, anyway.

After a few minutes, during which he and Cora saw the visitors out (for everyone suddenly became conscious of the time), he followed Phil upstairs and found him sitting forlornly on the side of his cot. They looked at each other for a long moment. Phil was defiant. A low growl escaped him. A very low growl — from the region of his stomach.

"Hungry, huh?" said Carter. "Well, I can understand that. You only had some toast and orange juice for breakfast, and I guess you haven't eaten since. Well, young man, you're going to be even hungrier, because you're not getting any dinner tonight. Did you like the picture? We'll talk about it tomorrow morning over breakfast — if I decide to let you have any breakfast."

He stepped back, pulled the door of the room shut, and, taking a ring of skeleton keys from his pocket, locked it, as if it were the door of the solitary (that is, the single) cell of his jail.

"Locked in!"

The prisoner, lying in bed with the sheet pulled up about his bare shoulders, thought of his harsh sentence with some resentment. And he was so hungry too! His stomach stirred restlessly, in confirmation, muttering faintly, like a sleeper disturbed by a bad dream.

The window to his right, wide open, was like a picture of a summer evening. There were trees nearby (in which he could hear the friendly birds calling to one another); and he could see in the distance, on the other side of the creek, an upland meadow bristling with fir, spruce and pine, and the peaked roof of a house with a thin thread of white smoke rising straight into the air from its

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chimney. He lay awake a long time, feeding on his misery, and waiting for the sun to go down — which it did like one of his favorite heroes fighting against overwhelming odds: reluctantly, and in a blaze of glory. His room faced west, and every detail in it was almost preternaturally visible. The backs of his books on the shelf across the room were gilded with a glowing light. He could easily read the titles: *The Three Musketeers, The Count of Monte Cristo, The Last of the Mohicans, The Jungle Book, Alice in Wonderland* (which his father had said only a sissy would want to read), *Peck's Bad Boy* (a gift from his father — not that he didn't like it), a large illustrated Poe, *Jeeves,* and three *Mutt & Jeff* albums. But these things darkened even as he watched, as if the house lights of a theater were being dimmed....

He was conscious of the room and of everything in it, even of the scene outside his window, but he seemed to be watching, still, *The Man in the Iron Mask.* Douglas Fairbanks, wearing that dread device, towered before him, wavered, and was gone....Hadn't that been a swell picture? As an impartial critic he was sure of it, but his merely personal enjoyment of it was spoiled for a while when he saw his father walking up the aisle, shining that flashlight into people's faces...saw him stumble, fall forward into the aisle, dropping the flashlight with an astonishing clatter. Startled by the noise, Phil jerked his head back — on his pillow. He was in bed, his heart beating fearfully. He listened. And heard again the groping, clopping, clattering noise. It was on the stairs...at the top of the stairs...in the hallway, coming towards him. No: it had turned aside...into his mother's room. Of course. It was his father. His father, coming home drunk, had fallen on the stairs. Phil chuckled, picturing the sheriff drunk in that outlandish costume.

He must have been asleep for some time, he decided, for the moon was visible through the window, and it would have taken it some hours to have worked its way stealthily (like Leatherstocking around a party of Indians) over his house. Lolling his head on the pillow, he saw that a pale oblong of its light had spilt across the floor and was overlapping on one side the toes of some shoes pointing out from the wall next to the door. Which was odd. Very odd. Because his shoes were under his bed. He remembered kicking them — oh, a long time ago! — under the bed as he fretfully plucked off his clothes. So...what were those shoes by the wall? Could they be his father's? No...he could see they were too small; they were a boy's shoes.

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Could his mother have bought him a new pair for the funeral...and forgot to tell him about them? No, not likely.

They were glistening black. The moonlight crinkled on them like cellophane. And how funny those white socks looked. People didn't wear socks like that anymore, going right up to the knee — not boys, anyway, not even with...what were they called? Oh, yes — knickerbockers. Had his father ever worn knickerbockers? He might have. He was a boy in Chicago back before the Great War. But, really, he wouldn't have worn white stockings with them. That would have made him look like a sissy, and he wouldn't have stood for that. Black shoes, white socks, blue silk pants...and those white hands hanging out of the white lace cuffs at the side of the pants.

Phil's body stiffened beneath the sheets. He raised his head from his pillow, felt the hairs at the back of his neck prickle.

There was somebody standing beside the door.

He tried to call out —

"Who's there? Who is it?"

— but no recognizable words emerged. An owl mocked him from the creek, but there was no reply from the figure against the wall.

And as he stared, he gradually made out that above the blue silk pants was a white frilly shirt and a jacket, a black velvet jacket, perhaps, because it seemed to drink up the light like a blotter. And above the shirt and jacket there was...a face, yes...but this was funny: although the hands were white, the face seemed to be black. Or, anyway, very dark. Could it be Willy Burns, the Negro boy who lived on the other side of the tracks? But how could Willy have gotten into his locked room? Besides, it wasn't exactly a face. It was a face of sorts, but like a face in a cartoon, or....

He was jolted by a guilty start. What he was seeing seemed suddenly to have some mysterious but strong and dreadful meaning.

He had seen that face before.

This afternoon.

At the Strand Theater.

It was not a face but a mask. An iron mask. Like the one Douglas Fairbanks had worn. Only this was a boy.

He called again, louder this time and more intelligibly, but with no more effect than before. The boy in the iron mask neither moved nor spoke, but stood as quietly as...

...as one dead.

And he was in the same room with it, a room with a locked door.

He tried to call out, to call his father, who had locked him in with this thing. But each time he raised

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his voice, it broke under the load of fear, like a weak branch with too much weight on it.

He had to get out. The door was locked, but there was another way out of the room. He had hardly had the thought when he found himself stepping out of bed and out the window in his bare feet, for his bedroom window looked out over a slanting surface of roof. Dangerously slipping and sliding on the dew-wet shingles, he scrambled along the roof to the next window and looked in — saw the moonlight carpeting the bare hallway, saw the door of his room, so close at hand, tightly closed, expressionless, enigmatic. He raised the window noiselessly and, stepping inside, padded quickly down the hall, past his door, to his parents' bedroom.

He stood trembling on their dark threshold, partly from the cold, because he wasn't wearing any pajamas or nightshirt. From the right side of the bed there issued a familiar sound: a lumberjack sawing down a tree.

"What is it, Phil?" His mother's voice, from the left, quiet, but fully awake. "Did you climb out through the window?"

"There's someone in my room."

He could feel her eyes studying him in the darkness. But she was out of bed and ready, if necessary, to wake her husband.

"It's a boy," added Phil. "He's wearing an iron mask."

"Oh, my God," sighed his mother, with a weary laugh. "That's what you get for going to bed with an empty stomach."

"It's not a dream, I tell you. He's real."

"Here!" She threw him the cloak his father had worn to his lodge. "Wrap this around you, my little jaybird, and come down to the kitchen with me. I'll get you a fried-egg sandwich and a glass of milk. And, *shhh,*" she whispered conspiratorially as he wrapped the melodramatic cloak about himself, "don't wake your father."

When Phil — who had spent the rest of the night on the sofa in the front room, his head lying on the fringed shawl that hid the ineradicable bloodstains — when Phil and his mother came back from church the next morning, his jailer was still "sleeping it off." So the boy got off lightly most of the day. But there were complications, nevertheless, for when his mother went in to make up his bed, she saw that the small reproduction of Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* next to the door had been defaced. Some childish hand had taken a black crayon and had scrawled over the face, almost obliterating it. She recognized the smudged marks as an attempt to draw a mask. An

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iron mask, she supposed.

"Why did you do that, Phil?"

He stared at it. "I didn't. *He* must have done it."

"He?"

Phil, his face guarded, dropped his gaze to the floor. She repeated her question. An answer escaped him. "The Boy in the Iron Mask. He did it."

She drew back, regarded him anxiously. There was something wrong here. If that was a lie, it wasn't a normal lie. And if it wasn't a lie, if he really believed it —!

"Phil," she brought out at last, "you have to get this iron mask business out of your head."

But he found that harder to do than she to say.

That night, he had a short and rather one-sided discussion with his father — for Cora had told the sheriff about the Boy in the Iron Mask as a kind of wonder. Phil didn't want to sleep in his room, but his father easily induced him to do so and with some show of willingness.

"You don't want me to think you're a sissy, do you?"

There could, of course, be only one answer to that; and it followed — by a series of short logical steps along which his father conducted him — that he had to sleep in his room that night, had to banish from his mind all such nonsense as Phantom Boys. So he turned, rather early but after supper — for his mother had insisted on his being fed — he turned, rather early, to the stairs, internally very uneasy but conscious that he was under his father's eye and must put on as brave a show as he could. But he knew that he was never very brave, even at his best. He wasn't like Lou. Lou wasn't afraid of anything. Perhaps, he thought bitterly, perhaps Lou should have been his father's son.

This time his door was not locked. He put on his pajama bottoms and kept on his socks...in case he should want to leave in a hurry. "Maybe tonight," he told himself, "maybe tonight I won't see him."

He lay awake for some time, repeating that to himself, but he must have fallen asleep at last. Must have, because he woke up. Woke with a start and lay there wondering what had awakened him. He listened — but heard nothing and saw nothing of which to be afraid, and yet he shivered beneath his single sheet, as if in anticipation of the...coming winter. His open window framed a picture of the night sky, sprinkled with stars and decorated with a moon, but his room seemed very dark. How he hated the dark! If only he dared get out of bed to pull the cord of his light! But he didn't

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dare, and he lay trembling in the darkness.

At last, unable to bear the suspense, he quavered, "Are you there?"

There was no spoken answer to this question from the suspended darkness of his room. Or from his dresser. Or his mirror. Or his shelf of books. Or from the figure that stood at the far edge of the square patch of moonlight. It was the figure of a boy about his own size and, as he supposed, his own age, and wearing over its face, as on the previous night, an iron visor. It was dressed, again as on the previous night, as if it were on its way to a meeting of the Masquers...although no one so young would have been admitted to that ribald gathering — a thought that was overtaken and shouldered aside by another: What if the Masquers were playing a trick on him? A practical joke? Paying him back for having skipped Lou's funeral? Of course! It was just the kind of thing those jokers would do! He had heard about some of the things they had done, how they had scared Tom Potter so that he stayed sober for two months. He grasped at this idea. What was happening was still scary, but at least it made sense, it was part of the real world. But in the next instant he saw something that swept aside this hopeful possibility, something that wrung from him a curious spasm of sickening disgust and left him prostrate, absolutely convinced of the authenticity of his mysterious visitor. The dark metal beneath the square rectangles of eyes was wet, streaked with tears. The Boy in the Iron Mask was crying.

Phil would have spoken again, but all power of speech and of movement had failed him. He might have said, if he had been able to say anything, that he couldn't possibly become any more afraid without fainting or dying. But he would have been wrong — as he discovered when that mute figure moved.

It came forward, one hand raised to the grille that concealed its features, the other stretched towards Phil. It advanced slowly until it stood at the foot of his bed....

And screamed.

No. It was not the Boy who screamed. It was Phil himself. He heard himself screaming — heard, as if he were a long way off.

That was horrible, that was horrible enough, but what was more horrible was that something outside his room was contemptuously dissatisfied with his weak and feeble cry and took it away from him — took it up, enlarged it, deepened it, and prolonged it. It was as if his scream had been

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seconded, voted on, and passed unanimously by the town council. For the town screamed. He heard it screaming. Heard the sound of its baritone howl overflow the town and spill across the countryside. Heard Bombazine, the neighbor's black Scotch terrier, bark in terror. Heard all the dogs of the town bark, the dogs across the creek, in the upland meadow and over the hill; heard their small frenzied yaps, yelps and barks puncturing and dotting the long wavering surface of that scream ... which stunned all thought and made the hair on his head crawl and bristle, which rattled the mirror above his dresser, rattled the picture of the Blue Boy on the wall, rattled the glass of his window. And from the corner of his eye he glimpsed through the window a flutter of white, a figure all in white, like a conventional ghost, or like a man in his nightshirt, running along the path on the other side of the creek.

The sight of that running thing, the example it showed him that movement was possible, freed him from his paralysis. Still screaming, he flung the bedclothes up and forward with all his might and in the same movement sprang out of bed. His sheet fell over the speechless thing that stood at the foot of his bed, as if to snuff it out, and Phil, looking back as he wrenched open the door of his room, saw it standing there draped with the sheet like an unveiled statue. He ran — ran forward, through the scream as through a resisting medium and through a haze of light, ran buffeting from side to side down the narrow hallway. And collided with something — something as substantial as the thing in his room, which caught him and whirled him aloft in powerful arms and shook him.

"Phil! Phil! For God's sake, control yourself!"

The scream that had so filled the house and the town and the night ended with a dying fall, a wail trailing away ... and Phil heard only his own pitiably small and lonely voice ... which likewise lapsed and trailed away. And the silence that followed seemed for a moment as thick as cotton wadding, as if he had been deafened by that scream and would never hear again.

But his father noisily moved. He shoved Phil into the bedroom and his mother's arms, turned, ran down the hall, his shirt fluttering, a boot under one arm. They heard him clattering down the stairs, heard the front door slam.

"Honey," said Phil's mother, "it's all right. You're in no danger. It's probably just a fire at the mill."

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"It's not that. He's in my room again. The Boy in the Iron Mask."

"You've been dreaming, dear. The siren woke you from a nightmare."

"No, no, he's real. I saw him."

"All right, dear, all right." Humoring him. "You can stay here till your father gets home."

His father was home in an hour.

"Jesus Christ!" he groaned. "It was that Barney Google. He got into the mill looking for a place to sleep and somehow — by accident, maybe, or mischievously, or insanely, who knows? — he pulled the cord of the siren and hung on. Woke up the whole damned town! There must be fifty people out in the street! We found him hiding behind a stack of lumber, whimpering and trembling like a whipped dog. Something has to be done about that nut! The town council is meeting Wednesday, and they're going to give Barney his walking papers. *I'll* see to that. Rosewood can do without a town lunatic. He's going to be on that train Wednesday night."

"But, dear, where will he go? He's lived here all his life."

"That's too long. He should have been gotten rid of years ago." Wrenching off his right boot, he froze, stared. "What are you doing here, Phil?"

"I told him he could sleep here tonight," said Mrs. Carter.

"Good Lord, are you such a sissy that a siren scares hell out of you?"

"It's not that. He saw the ghost again."

Carter held his position, his expression like that of a man who has a suspicion he's going to be sick at his stomach. He got up off the bed, lurched towards Phil, his half-removed right boot dragging horribly. "You're making that up!"

"No, I'm not. He's real. I saw him."

"I won't have that, Phil," said Carter quietly. He slapped Phil very hard on the right side of his face and, bringing his hand back, hit him backhanded on the other side.

The boy reeled back, eyes wide with shock.

"Henry!" cried Mrs. Carter. "What's got into you? What are you doing —?"

"I won't have that," repeated the sheriff. "If you've been telling a story, okay — I'll overlook it this time. But I won't have you seeing things. I won't have you like Barney —"

Phil cried — or, rather, yelled — "He's real, I tell you. He was in my room."

Carter raised his hand again, but his wife, who had come around

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from the other side of the bed, caught his arm. "What do you think you're doing? — interrogating a prisoner?" Her husband looked at her with something of Phil's look, as if she had struck him across the face.

"Go back to your room, Phil," said his mother, with unaccustomed authority. "The hall light is on, and you can keep your light on and the door open."

Sheriff Carter said nothing, but he eyed his son as the boy got up and left the room. And Phil, glancing back, thought that he would never forget that look as long as he lived. He knew that in his father's eyes he was a coward ... and perhaps something less blamable but worse.

Lying again between the rumpled sheets in his glaring room, his Visitor harshly dispelled, he heard his parents arguing in low voices far into the night. His last thought as he drifted off to sleep, and his first when he woke, was: *My dad thinks the wrong boy died in that accident.*

Dr. Vredenburg, who kept a combination hospital and sanitarium not a hundred yards down the road, dropped in just after supper the following day. The first intimation Phil had that the man was coming was when he heard the familiar pleasant chuckle of the doctor's Model A Ford fall silent in front of the house instead of musing its throaty way on past.

Rotund and grey, with the cheerful thoughtful face of a country priest, this man was the licensed Free Thinker of the town, tremendously radical in his opinions, but so very necessary — there was only one other doctor in the county — that people smiled rather than frowned at his eccentricities. He boasted Baltimore as his birthplace, but though exiled (for his opinions, it was thought) to these Pacific backwoods, he kept his finger on the pulse of the times. He had subscriptions to *The American Mercury* and *The Dial*, and it was said that he had known Mencken, George Jean Nathan and Sinclair Lewis personally, men whose massive, if rather cloudy, visages he would have carved, if he had had his way, upon Mount Shasta.

Phil's father and mother excused themselves, pleading kitchen duties, and the boy found himself alone in the living room with this awesome personage. He felt a premonitory chill. Could it be that the doctor had come to see *him?*

He had. The physical examination was routine and brief. Phil had no fever and his reflexes were normal. But the questions that followed were far more searching

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than any that had ever been put to him, questions about The Boy in the Iron Mask and questions that had nothing to do with the Boy but were personal, horribly personal. This man, so much softer than his father, was far more ruthless in his way. He seemed to want to, and to be able to, lean forward and poke his chubby fingers into every secret place. Phil, standing directly before him, was unable to look away from the doctor's face, and yet he could hardly be said to see it ....It floated before him in a kind of haze. Paralyzed and helpless, he wanted to shrink out of sight, to get away from this terrible man and his terrible questions — questions that went on and on and on until, finally, almost choked by fear, mortification and smothered indignation, he cried out:

"He's real, God damn you! He's real! That's all there is to it!"

And he buried his face in his hands, his fingers covering his eyes ... but when he raised them from that grating, they were dry and hard. The doctor watched his face, his eyes moving slightly back and forth as if he were reading something written there ... and he seemed to draw some conclusion from what he saw. There was something of commiseration in his face as he settled back in his easy chair, but something also, as he reached for his pipe, of satisfaction. "That's okay, Phil. Ask your father and mother to step in here, will you?"

When Mr. and Mrs. Carter came back into the room, Phil was sent upstairs to bed. He mounted the steps slowly, his legs trembling and weak from his ordeal. The doctor's disembodied voice floated up to him. "Forgive me ... this is an embarrassing question to ask, but ... has there been any, ah, eccentricity or mental trouble in either of your families?"

"Not in mine! You can bet on *that.*" And Phil, looking down over the banister, felt for perhaps the first time in his life, a twinge of contempt for his father. He went on to his room, his dreaded room, leaving the door open. His mother's voice was slower in reaching him, and when it did he couldn't make out the words.

"Sure there was, Cora!" His father's voice was emphatic. "You remember that uncle of yours you've told me about. The minister who used to go out in the woods and preach to himself and beat his Bible to pieces."

"Well," the free - thinking doctor's voice was very dry, "it's hard to tell with religious people."

"Why, no, Henry!" — The voice of Mrs. Carter rose into hearing: "He was my uncle by marriage. His wife, Aunt Leona, was my blood relative."

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There was a throaty chuckle, as if the doctor were doing an impersonation of his car. "That's good. Insanity isn't transmitable by marriage. Except to the children, of course. Why ... thank you, Sheriff! My throat *is* a trifle dusty. I'm not in any danger of being arrested if I drink this, am I?" The Model A idled again in the living room, and Phil knew that his father had brought out from behind the encyclopedia the glasses and bottle of whiskey appropriated from a bootlegger. He turned on his light and stood looking about his room, involuntarily twitching when he surprised a startled and apprehensive face in the mirror above his dresser.

As he undressed, he heard his name mentioned again downstairs. "You're both grown-up people, and I won't disguise from you that his hallucinating like that — for, believe me, he thinks he did see that boy — is alarming. Very alarming. That mustn't be blinked. But you both tell me there's no history of insanity in your families, and that gives us grounds for hope. It means that there's no constitutional psychic weakness in Phil, and so all this may be nothing more than a passing crisis brought on by extreme guilt feelings at having skipped the funeral of the friend who saved his life to go to that moving picture show. Forgive me, but it's almost beautiful! It's a classic case of a guilt complex. That Boy who comes to see him is, of course, the embodiment of his guilt. We can guess whose face is under that mask, can't we? And, of course, if he could be brought to admit he did wrong, his friend's visits would cease."

Sheriff Carter's voice dropped an octave. "If that's what it takes, then that's what he's going to do." Phil, sliding between his sheets, allowed himself a sad and bitter smile.

"No, no, don't bully the boy! If he simply parrots the right words because you're holding a gun to his head, it won't do any good. He has to admit it to himself, not to you. You should never use force on unstable persons — and Phil *is* rather unstable. Just now, anyway. If he becomes any more so, if he continues to see this Boy in the Iron Mask, perhaps he should come and stay with me for a while at the sanitarium, where .... No, no, Cora, don't upset yourself; it's just a thought. We haven't come to that yet. Well! That's really all I have to say about Phil at the moment ... but, Sheriff, there is another matter I'd like to discuss with you. I hear a rumor that you're planning to run Barney out of town."

"That's something I was going to take up Wednesday at the town

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meeting, Doc. I would have told you and the others about it then. I know all you old-timers knew Barney's family, but they're all dead now, and there's no reason for him to hang around Rosewood. Here, he's a public eyesore, but in San Francisco, for instance, he wouldn't bother anyone much; he'd be lost in the crowd of other drifters ...."

"That's exactly why he shouldn't go there! Here we all know him and can look after him. Look, I got him a job today, and if he needs a place to sleep, I can easily supply him with one ...."

"Nothing doing, Doc. I know you're being kind, but a lumbering town like Rosewood can't afford to keep around someone with that taint in his blood. What if he starts playing with matches?"

"Sheriff, when it comes to matches, Barney has as much common sense as you have!"

"Sorry, Doctor. I'm putting the matter before the village fathers Wednesday, and, if I know them, they'll go along with me."

"Well, here's one member of the council who'll vote against you! You're sitting on my coat, Sheriff. Coffee? No, thank you, Cora. I have to drive to Arcady to see a patient, and coffee intoxicates me." There was the sound of the front door being unlatched. "It's cooled off a bit, hasn't it?" observed Vredenburg, his voice again very dry.

Phil, lying beneath a patchwork quilt (for the doctor's weather diagnosis had been correct) heard his mother coming slowly up the stairs and into his room. "Dear, the doctor says you're going to be all right."

"I heard what he said, Mother. He thinks I'm crazy ... but I'm not."

"No, no, my dear boy, I know that. I'll tell you what. School doesn't start for another month. Why don't you and I go away for a few weeks to the City" — she meant San Francisco. "There's a talking picture playing there, *Broadway Melody of 1929*. Wouldn't you like ...?"

"Yes, yes, Mother. Don't cry. We'll go away, if you like. But not tomorrow. I have a couple of things to do first."

The doorway was darkened by his father's gaunt form. "Phil ... if you like, we can make up a bed for you on the floor of our room."

"Thanks, Dad. But, you know, I think I might as well sleep in here." His voice was calm, "mature" — as if he were the same age as the sheriff ... who was a little surprised by his tone.

"Okay, Phil. You can keep your light on and the door open, and we'll keep ours open. Come to bed, Cora."

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His mother, after several parting caresses, went out of the room.

Phil propped his pillows behind him against the wall and sat up in bed, his hands folded before him on the colorful blanket. He sat there a long time. Then, getting stealthily out of bed, he moved to the door of his room and stood listening. The house was silent. His father and mother were in bed and probably asleep. He tiptoed out into the hall and pulled the string of the hall light: neither the click nor the expunging darkness evoked any sound of surprise from his parents' room. He stepped back into his own room and very quietly closed the door. He pulled the string of the naked bulb hanging from the ceiling, and the room plunged into night, like a stone dropped down a black well — plunged into a night at first absolute and somehow grateful. He moved back to his bed, bumping his shins, and groped his way between his sheets. His eyes slowly adjusting to the darkness, he carefully rearranged his pillows and sat up in bed, with his back to the wall.

And waited.

The silence deepened hour by hour, and still the boy sat patiently waiting, his hands folded on the coverlet before him, his calm face addressed to the expectant darkness. Any onlooker would have said that he had never seen a boy so calm, a boy so unlike that boy who had pommeled the water in imitation of the Persian king.

He had no clock but his heart. The long hours pulsed away, until the lower rim of the moon warily showed itself at the upper edge of his window ... and still he sat, patiently waiting.

And heard a sound, a liquid sound, so faint that he thought at first it was but the memory of his mother weeping. But, no, it was touching, if very lightly, his outer ear: a single cobweb strand of sound, barely tangible but real. It was so faint that it might have been the sound of the creek some fifty yards away ... if the creek ever made a sound, which it never did. The moonlight crept across the floor, and he gradually made out that the weeping came from a figure sitting in his solitary chair on the other side of the door. The figure's face was lowered into its hands. Its shoulders shook slightly, but there was no other movement. It was weeping quietly, as if in exhaustion and despair.

Phil stepped out of bed, stood for a moment contemplating that huddled shape. Then, slowly, he approached it.

"Can I help you? Please — is there anything I can do?"

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The sound of the weeping ceased. Phil, moving one cautious foot at a time, paced closer, like a schoolboy walking across a graveyard at midnight on a dare. And yet he was absolutely unafraid. The shoulders behind the heavy bowed head ceased their slight quivering. The Boy in the Iron Mask was listening ... listening to hear again those words.

"Can I help you?" repeated Phil, taking another step forward.

The figure raised its face from its hands and revolved its mask, like a turret, towards him. Phil repeated his supplicating question ... and the Boy raised trembling fingers to the visor that imprisoned its features and the clasps that encircled its head.

"Yes. Yes, I know. You want the mask removed. I'll help you to get it off. I don't know how ... but I'll try."

He reached out and touched the mask. It was cold, hard, coarse-grained, and dull to the touch. It reflected no light, except below the eyes where it was streaked with tears. It was substantial. As was also the pale hand that rose and clutched him by the wrist, clutched it so firmly that for a moment he felt it would be as difficult to remove as those iron bands. But he was proof even against the panic that that clasp, the clasp of desperate gratitude, might have induced: the iron had entered into his soul. And he pressed on.

"Come into the back yard. There are tools there."

The Boy in the Iron Mask rose, and the two boys went out of the room, down the hallway and down the stairs, side by side. They might have been twins — the Corsican Brothers, say, for they were very similar in build. They went out the back way of the house, Phil closing the screen door noiselessly behind them. The moon was very bright, touching every familiar object with a sidelong light. Bombazine, the black Scotch terrier from next door, was standing beside the woodpile. He raised his head with its pointed ears and gazed, eyes wide and voiceless, at the two figures crossing the yard. But, surely, he had seen two boys before? What was there here to strike him motionless and dumb? The trees beyond the fence waved their branches slowly, as if in a state of calm madness.

At the far end of the yard was a shed which served as a garage for the stately, officious Buick. The shadow of an owl glided across its tin roof. The two figures — no onlooker could have said which was the more spectral; but there was no onlooker, save the dog, who stood, still staring — the two figures were swallowed up in the gaping blackness of the shed.

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Bombazine listened. Uncertain, groping noises came from within the dark interior, and then the sound of metal beating on metal. *Clink! Clank! Clink!* Bombazine shuddered, turned and fled.

Clink! Clank! Clink! The anvil chorus went on, monotonously, bar after bar. One might have thought the house would be alarmed. And so it was. A light flashed on in the second story — in the bedroom of Phil's parents. It was joined by another, that of the hallway, and by a third on the west side of the house in Phil's nighted bedroom. A name was called. There was no answer but the sound of metal on metal. *Clink! Clank! Clink!*

Phil's father showed at the back door of the house. He peered out, girding his robe thoughtfully about him. The screen door banged. He strode across the yard towards the shed. Phil's mother stared down from above, framed by the lighted window of her bedroom. She saw her husband vanish into the darkness of the shed.

The beating of metal on metal broke off. Silence. She anxiously stared and waited. And then, amazed, heard the banging start again: metal on metal, the same tempo, the very same touch, as before.

Abruptly another metallic note was struck: a single note, discordant, peremptory, final. It was followed by a cry that startled and froze her, that caused her hand to leap to her throat and flutter there — such a cry as must have greeted the fall of the Bastille, such a shriek as might have escaped the throat of a prisoner when the door of his cell is thrown open: a cry elated and free and yet, like that prisoner, bearing the marks of long despair. It was followed by ... nothing; a silence at last gratefully broken by the magnified creaking of an unseen door. And she saw a boyish figure appear on the far side of the shed. It walked away down the dirt lane bordered by the field whose lower edge was soaking and crumbling in the fatal creek. Could it be Phil? Where was he going in those white socks?

The figure, as if in response to these questions — although she had not broken the silence with any profane call — turned its face towards her, a face she saw distantly as a chiaroscuro of moonlight alnd shadow. She stared, desperately. It was as difficult, and as easy, as trying to see a face in an ink blot. Could it be —? It looked like — but, no, it couldn't be *that* face from so long in the past (for the best and most homelike of women has her secrets). No, that was an illusion of moonlight and

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distance. Was it really Phil, then? The figure went on down the dark lane, the white socks twinkling, fluttering, from sight.

Below her, two other figures emerged from the shed into the yard. A boy and a man. The man's right arm was draped in a comradely way about the boy's shoulders; suspended from his hanging left arm was something which the night gave her an excuse for not recognizing. The man was her husband. The boy — she stared again, sighed, with a quick unobserved smile — the boy was her son. But of course it was her son. Who else could it possibly be but Phil?

She hurried downstairs to meet them, doing so at the foot of the stairs abutting on the front room. Her laconic husband raised and gestured with the thing he held in his hand — and tossed it into the front room where it fell heavily onto the sofa, upon the fringed shawl that hid the bloodstains.

Mrs. Carter glided forward, strained towards it; and it, grim as some old instrument of torture, gazed back up at her.

Later that morning, Doctor Vredenburg's car again lapsed into silence in front of the house. The sheriff had come back from his office briefly to meet the doctor, and so the entire Carter family was present in the living room. Unclouded sunlight, warm and sane, poured in through the curtained windows.

"I understand," said Vredenburg, with a glance at Phil, "that there are new developments?"

"That's right," said Carter. "I saw him myself last night. The Boy in the Iron Mask."

Vredenburg gave him a look which conveyed instantaneously and involuntarily the unspoken thought: So, the insanity *is* on your side of the family, after all?

"No, no!" said the sheriff, replying with a touch of asperity to the look. "Here's the evidence. See?" — removing the mask from behind a sofa cushion. "He's as real as you and I are. And, furthermore, I know who he is. Generally, anyway. I don't know his name, but he's a second cousin or perhaps a nephew of a nephew of mine. You see, I have some second cousins in Missouri who have always been rather — well, funny. Eccentric in their behavior. When we were talking last night, I didn't mention them because they're too distantly related to me to be worth mentioning. Second cousins. It sounds odd, but they all have a peculiar look, they all resemble each other, and I can ususally spot one of them on sight, even if I've never met him before. Well, this kid is one of them."

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Phil favored his father with a long and curious look (as did his mother, though more discreetly). For he too had recognized the Boy. When he had struck that last decisive blow with the hammer, the sound it made startled him terribly; and there rang through him, like an echo of that sound, a thought, wild but unutterably compelling: *If the face is Lou's — if this is somehow Lou — I'll go away and leave him here to be a son to my father.* But when the heavy mask had dropped to the floor, a single shaft of moonlight piercing down through a hole in the tin roof of the shed had fallen upon the ecstatically upraised face of the Boy, and Phil saw, with an unspeakable relief and gratitude, that the face was his own.

"I was so surprised," went on his father, "especially by that cry of joy he let out when Phil got the mask off — Phil insisted on doing it himself — that before I could say two words (and me the sheriff!) he'd turned and walked out the back door of the shed and was gone. What in the world the kid thought he'd been doing, I don't know for sure. We never lock our doors — don't have to, in this part of the country — and he might have been sneaking into the house every night just to scare Phil here, although he certainly didn't last night, did he, Phil? Or maybe he wanted help in getting the mask off. That's more likely. He certainly couldn't have put that mask on, himself, so some grown-up has been mistreating him. And it was put on since last Saturday, I know that. For this is what's strange, too. I saw him Saturday at the picture theater when I went to look for Phil, only I didn't recognize him at the time. Jimmy" — James Boyle was Sheriff Carter's sole deputy — "is out looking for him now, and if he's still in this neck of the woods, we'll pick him up."

Vredenburg got up from the easy chair he had dropped into, like a man rising to address a meeting. A town council meeting. He cleared his throat. "Great, Sheriff, great! I'm glad everything turned out so ... unexpectedly well." He moved towards the door, paused, looked back, evidently checked by a thought, a casual thought of no great importance. "By the way, Sheriff, I hope you've had time to think over our other little discussion of last night. You know, the one about Barney. I'd hate to see him run out of the county, despite that — what did you call it? — that 'taint in his blood'."

The sheriff studied the phlegmatic doctor closely ... as if it were slowly dawning on him that he had seen that face before. On a wanted

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poster. Then: "Okay, Doc. If you've gotten him a job, like you say, and if you'll keep an eye on him, it'll be okay with me if he stays on." Phil felt an inward amusement that wouldn't have been out of place in someone twice his age. Mrs. Carter turned away to straighten an antimacassar.

"The patient will live," said Vredenburg, looking around with an air of satisfaction. "So long. I have a couple of calls to make."

"That old fart!" snorted Carter the moment the door had closed behind the doctor. "Him and his 'classic guilt complex'! So that boy was 'the embodiment of guilt,' was he? He was the embodiment of flesh and blood!"

Phil thought his father was right. And the doctor too. He thought that the Boy was real, in that he was tangible, in that he came from the outside, but that he nevertheless had something to do with what came from the inside — with dreams, wishes, memories and guilt. He saw, or thought he saw, that the usual ideas about ghosts, spirits, demons, what have you, were simply too limited; they didn't cover all cases. But he didn't bother to mention what he thought. He knew that neither the shrewd sheriff nor the sagacious doctor would be much interested in speculations of a twelve-year-old boy on such a subject.

The sheriff now asked, "Where are you going, Phil?"

"Oh ... just out. I have a couple of calls to make too." And his father and mother smiled at the solemnity of this announcement.

His first call was on Lou's mother.

"Lou saved me from drowning. He saved my life. And I wouldn't even go to his funeral. I went to the moving pictures instead —"

He hadn't meant to cry, but found he couldn't go on. The water rose and choked him — it was almost as if he were drowning again. He bowed his head in her ample lap, gasping for breath, stranded, like a shipwrecked sailor washed ashore.

"Listen to me, Phil," she said, stroking his hair, gently. "Listen. I wouldn't tell anyone but you this. But Louie came to me last night. I saw him just as plain as I see you now. He was dressed like he was going to some sort of fancy party — I think maybe he was. He was sad, but he was happy too. And he asked me to forgive you. And I do."

Phil had one more visit to make. For he believed in keeping his promises.

Barney Smith, otherwise Google, proudly discharging his new duties (that is, poking about with a hoe among the weedy graves and tombs of the cemetery, where he was now

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employed as a caretaker) paused and looked on, unobserved, for some minutes at a young boy who was standing by that new grave. The kid was just standing there, looking down at the freshly turned earth, and — Barney felt a thrill of sympathetic identification — talking to himself. Funny thing, he was telling out loud the plot of that motion picture that had shown Saturday at the Strand. In great detail.

"And, Lou," he heard the boy conclude, "Lou, it was such a *swell* picture!"

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REPORT ON COMPETITION II

In the June issue, we asked for the final paragraphs of a science fiction story you would rather not have read. A rap on the knuckles to all those who sent in the final paragraphs of stories in the June issue. The winners:

FIRST PRIZE

Xant'l gazed at the Old One in the pre-dawn stillness. His third eye, the Eye of Destiny, blinked in its newness.

"The gods have seen your worthiness," the Old One intoned. "Now look to your future."

To his future? But what of softfeathered D'lla, or happy-go-lucky Vrt'll? And what of the crimson Fllgl with its winsome melodies? Would he forget? Could he forget? Ever?

Yes. He knew he would forget. It was the way.

"Good-by, Old One," Xant'l whispered.

The dawn of a new day broke. As he looked to the horizon, his third eye blurred over with the mists of grief.

Richard D. Wright

SECOND PRIZE

"Now you understand," Milthusia said.

Jack nodded. "The symbol is the thing."

"The object," Carol added, "is the thought!"

"I love you," Milthusia said, putting her hands ritualistically on their genitals, "as I love all humankind. Keep your people on the path, Carol-Jack, and do not let them stray. I give you great power."

"We shall use it wisely," Carol — or was it Jack? — said.

"Until you are ready to join us in the vastness of Interstellar Love," Milthusia said, "I leave you, Jack-Carol; I leave you, human kind. I shall be back." She walked into the sea.

"Good-by," Carol-Jack said simply.

Michael Kurland

RUNNERS-UP

"I give up!" Mary said, throwing herself on the cushions. "How did he do it? Either he was actually on all five planets simultaneously, but that would cause incredible paradoxes, wouldn't it? Or somehow he altered their local spacetime flows after the fact, but is that possible?" She looked up imploringly.

"It is, and that's exactly what young Eric did," he said. "It's simple: paradoxes absolutely cannot be created," he paused meaningfully, then lifted her to his lap, "but how he did it is too technical to go into right now, isn't it, my dear?"

Roseanne Clark

"But what will be done with the men:" said Lotus, surveying without sympathy the sullen remnant of the male army moving restlessly on the plain below.

"Oh, we'll not harm them," said Dhykelia with a tight smile. "They'll be confined to the arid sector, and quarantined there until the last of them dies. They can get a living off the land, if they work hard enough, and they'll be free to practice a dominant role on the lizards and hoonts, if that's still what they want. But enough about them. They were one of nature's mistakes, now rectified. Come!"

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And hand in hand they descended to build the new world.

Bob Leman

"I wondered how long it would take you to figure it out," the old man chuckled. "Not bad, not bad at all, sonny!"

Throggbert gasped. "You mean — you mean that you — that you and I — are one and the same man?"

"But of course!" The old man slapped his bony jumpsuited knee gleefully. "And that isn't all!"

"It isn't?" Throggbert repeated astonishedly.

"It sure ain't, sonny! Not only am I you — and o' course you are me, too — but I'm also your old pappy, your uncle Timothy, your cousin Phylbert Throggbert, and — y'see that old fossil skull in the lab display case over beside the window? — I'm Throgg the Java Man, too! And all through the miracle of time travel, yet, you bet!"

Richard A. Lupoff

Clingel turned to Dr. Rosemund, the final realization dawning in his eyes. "You mean all *this* ..." He swept his arm in a wide arc, indicated the demolished laboratory, the Institute, the Solar System, the very outer interstices of the Universe itself. "... is part of *their* plan?"

Dr. Rosemund's mouth blossomed in answer. "Yes."

"And the whole of human history, every detail of it, is part of *their* pre-conceived design?"

Dr. Rosemund's thorn-like nose cut the air, nodding. "Yes."

"Then where is human free will, Dr. Rosemund? What, after all, does anything *mean*?"

What, indeed? What, indeed?

Steven Robinett

One by one the stars vanished from the evening sky.

"They laughed at my entropy accelerator," I said ruthlessly. "But now as they witness the death throes of the Universe they must believe me!"

Gwendolyn looked up, cringing at the iron in my voice. She was the one heavenly body I was going to miss, but it couldn't be helped. The world had to pay for its disrespect.

"You mean?" she asked hesitantly.

"That's right," I chuckled mirthlessly, "this is ..."

Kenneth P. Service

She searched her reflection, hesitantly touched her face and slid delicate fingers exploringly along her pale arms and perfect breasts.

A battle was raging inside her as she stood before the vanity wall, a desperate struggle for understanding; and Callahan was honestly empathetic.

"Then it's true," she said finally, accepting it.

"It's true," he whispered.

"And I have ..." she groped for the proper word.

"Sisters," he interjected. "Yes, many."

She nodded her head and turned toward him uncertainly.

"Well," he said, smiling reassurance, "come over here and stop," he paused for effect, "*cloning* around."

Her anxiety vanished. She laughed.

Dennis R. Trisler

Gently, Edward, Lord Carlton, stroked Frances' hair as they gazed after the departing ships.

"It seems like only yesterday," she murmurred.

"Hmm?" Edward said, rousing himself from a preoccupied trance.

"The Streta. They were our

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counselors, our ministers ... our friends. And now we find that they were alien beings, trying their best throughout the centuries to stifle humanity and keep us from the stars."

"Hmm," Edward moved his hands lower on Frances' body.

"Now they've left us to our own destiny," she said as she watched the last spaceship leave the port. She turned her face up toward Edward, tears glistening in her eyes. "Do you think we'll make it?"

"Who?" Edward said, bending his head to meet her warm, quivering lips.

"Humanity!" she gasped as she came up for air. She glanced again at the empty spacefield. "I feel as if the world has ended."

"No," he said, pulling up her gown. "It's just beginning."

Nancy J. Sitton

And now, at long last, I was face-to-face with the Dark One I had so long and so relentlessly pursued. He stood alone, luridly lit by the hellish flames that ravened eternally in those loathesome purleius of the Netherworld. Slowly he drew back his hood and revealed his face. I staggered back, all but swooning, and sick at heart. For the face that was revealed — a ravaged mask scarred with indescribable evil and malice — was my own!

Bob Leman

"There they go," said Dr. Conner, pointing his pipe stem at the retreating line of alien ships. "They'll not be back."

"I think not," said Clark Wifly. Wifly sighed briefly. It had been a hard fight, with a bonus no one had expected. All the squabbling nations and races of Earth had joined to drive the Sirians back into space. Now all Earth was unified, and he, first World President Wifly, was its leader.

Wifly caught the reflection of his coal-black face in the porthole and smiled. He took another bite of watermelon.

Jake Fuchs

COMPETITION 12 (suggested by Richard Delap)

If two science fiction authors had collaborated on books, what would we get?

Childhood's Intersection by Clarke and Delany
To Your Scattered Blobels Go by Farmer and Dick
Make Room Enough for Love by Heinlein and Harrison
Flowers for Flesh, Keyes and Farmer

And others too horrid to contemplate . . .

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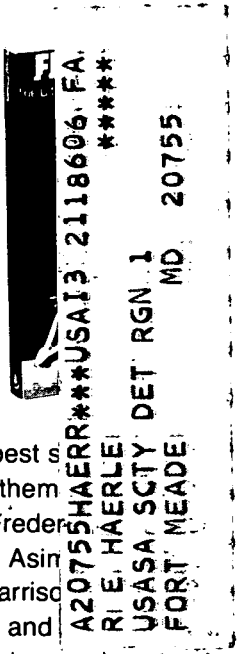

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